Marion Zimmer Bradley's

Fantasy

Magazine
Spring 1999
Issue 43

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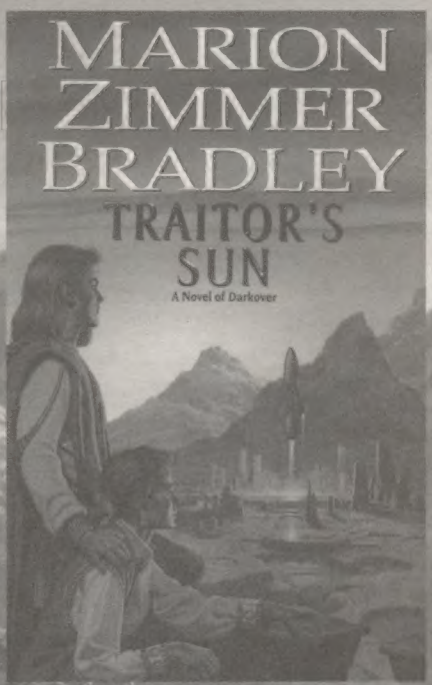

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Magazine

EDITORIAL

Jerome Bixby, who was the editor of *Planet Stories*, once said, "Marion Bradley writes well, she just writes too much." The main problem with most young writers is that they act as if their words were set in stone, as if it were terribly painful to them to have one deleted. If you can say something in ten words, why say it in three paragraphs?

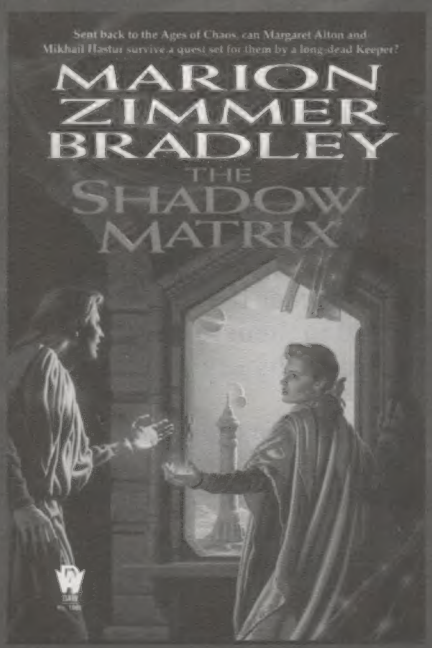
The best thing to do is to learn to cut one's own work. The nice thing about the computer is that you can easily remove a few letters or a whole line. Read each sentence over, preferably out loud, and see if there is a way to cut it. I remember the editor Judy Lynn Del Rey; she used to listen to me struggling to put something into words, and ask, "What are you trying to say?" I would struggle to express myself and she would say, "So say it, just like that."

The whole point of being a writer is to learn to express yourself in words. That's what writing is basically all about. For practice, take the articles in *Readers' Digest* and see if they can be cut down. When you finish cutting them, read them over and see if you can find the gaps. If you can't, you can consider yourself successful.

Never say anything in two sentences if it can be said in one. And that is, if not the whole art of writing, at least a good long step on the way.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY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THE SHADOW MATRIX

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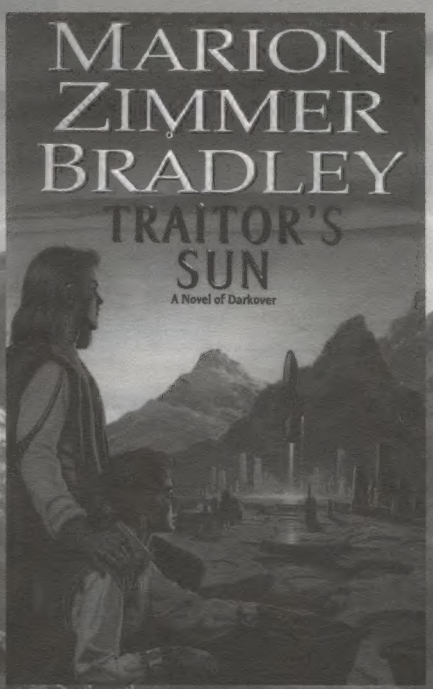

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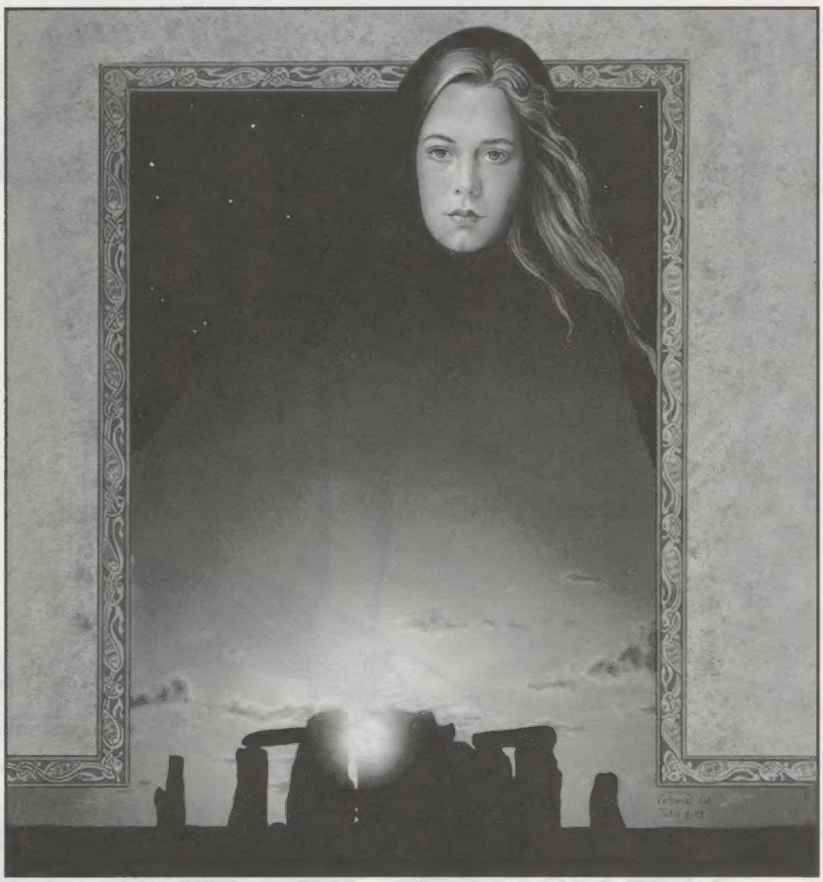

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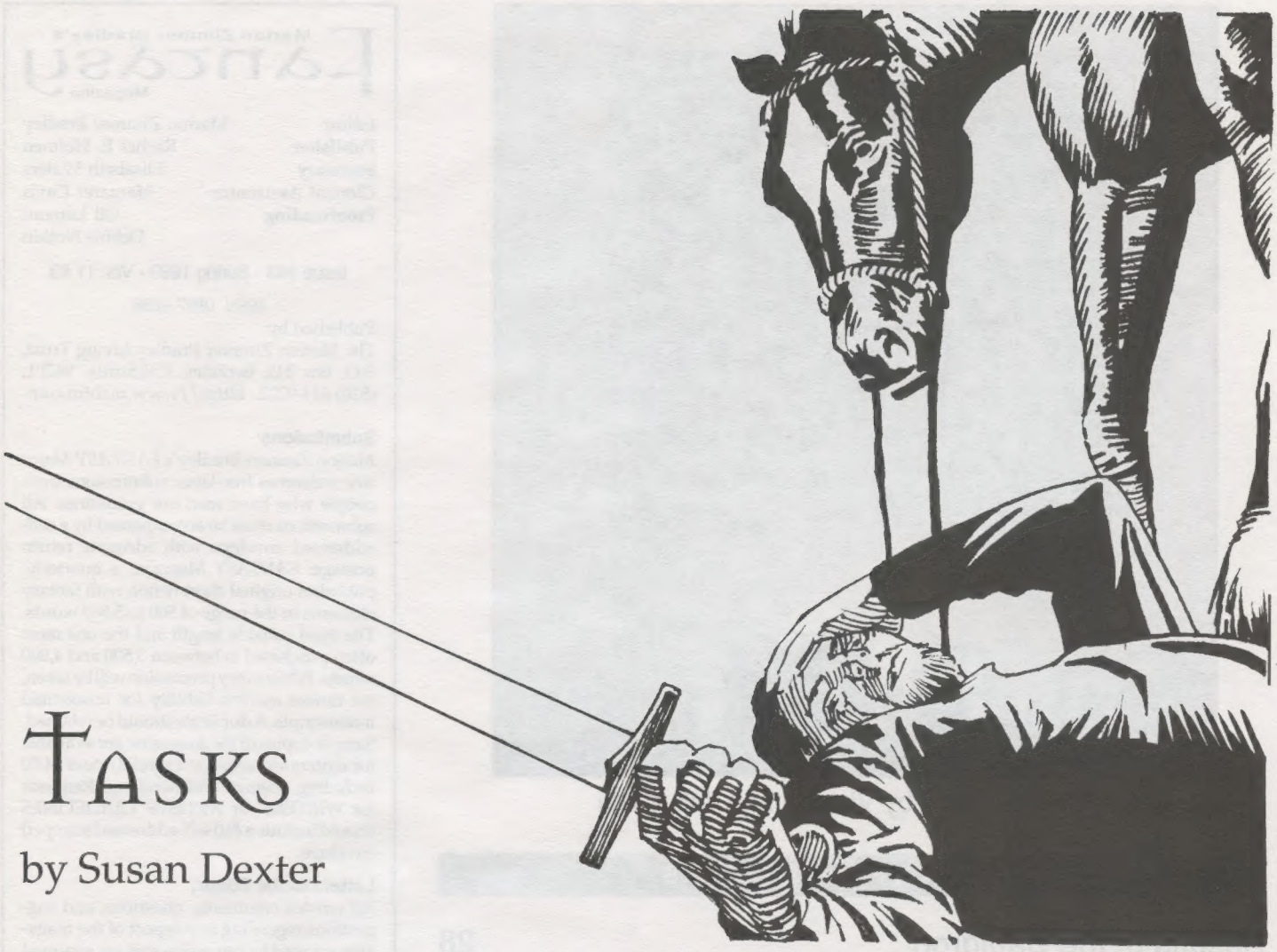

Tasks

by Susan Dexter

He lay on his back, staring up at a low gray sky. Whatever he rested upon felt firm, like stony earth, or frozen ground.

He was cold. Colder than frozen earth or frosty air could answer for — he was chilled to the marrow of every one of his bones. Dimly, he knew he did not customarily come back to himself in such a wretched condition. Yet he lacked the strength of concentration to wonder what had befallen him. Excepting the cold, he was comfortable enough, almost content. He lay, and looked at the sky.

The edges of his sight were dark. There actually *was* something dark at the lower edges of the sky, he decided, after considering the defect in his vision for a few moments. Murky shadows where the sky should have touched the earth. *Trees,* he thought, in what seemed a rush of comprehension, understanding spilling over. Trees standing at the edge of ... a road!

He was lying on his back in the middle of a road. It might be one of the spear-straight ways the Romans had made, built mile upon mile, and left behind when the Legions were called home from Brittania.

There was something more there, at the fringe of his vision. Something that moved. Came and went. He turned his head toward it, curious.

A horse. Viewed from a low angle, the beast looked huge, but he felt it was a rather large horse, all the same. It was black as a stormy sky, but its legs were splashed with white, clear up to its huge belly. Its arched nose was broadly blazed, pink down toward the nostrils. Reins of scarlet leather stretched from the bit in its mouth to his left hand, like a double birth-cord.

While he looked at his fingers, he could feel the touch of the leather wrapped about them. Wondering whether the same trick might not work in the other direction, he rolled his head carefully toward his right shoulder.

Yes, there was something in his right hand as well. A long sword. Its hilt was bound with twisted gold wire, wrapped where the swordsman's hand would grip. For a moment he was minded of a young girl's flaxen hair, intricately braided. He brushed the wire with the tips of his cold fingers, but the connection faded even as he sought it.

If he could move his head, and could direct his fingers, then surely he need not remain flat on his back? At first he could not think how to manage it, but once he had the notion, he could not let go of it. After a moment he pushed down into the heels of his hands, while he lifted his head. He sat up. His muscles seemed to know perfectly well how to move his bones about.

The horse sniffed him over, nuzzled his hair. His heart thudded painfully, working hard now that it needed to push his blood uphill. He shut his eyes and opened his mouth — he could not seem to get air enough into his lungs in this new position. He gasped like a

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

drowning man.

His head ached fit to kill him. It drooped forward, his neck had no say about the matter. He let loose of the sword — which unlike the horse could hardly run off and abandon him — and put five of his fingers to his scalp. He began to suspect that he might have taken a fall from that long-legged horse, and landed on his head. Roman roads were stone-paved.

He could discover no trace of any injury. There ought to have been a lump, or blood, or at least a spot that hurt to his touch. But though his head still hurt him, it seemed that every bit of the pain was *inside* his skull, where he could not touch it. Too dazed to halt at a lack of result, he examined his scalp and his face again and again, but there was still nothing to notice.

He considered the rest of himself, now that he could see. He was clad in a tunic of pale wool, and trews made of a similar sort of cloth, with panels of leather stitched on top. He owned boots — tall, horseman's boots, with heels. His cloak — or perhaps it was a mantle — was a dark indistinct plaid, alternating broad stripes of murky colors intersecting to make the pattern.

All the cloth seemed whole. Likewise his skin. Whatever had befallen him had not wounded him anywhere he could see, nor feel. After a moment he got to his feet. He felt no worse, though no better either.

The horse bore panniers behind its saddle, but the leather saddlebags were empty. Perhaps he had been set upon by bandits? Surely outlaws would have taken the horse and the sword too, while he lay helpless?

The ache in his head was dull, but unrelenting. Setting his jaw against its nagging, he put his foot into the left stirrup, and swung up onto the tall black horse. His legs and his back felt comforted at once, as if bestriding a horse was entirely familiar to them. Probably it was — though for all he knew, he had never ridden a mile in his entire life. Nor had a life, ere he woke to himself on the Roman road. His head swam, then steadied. He felt he could ride.

Which way to go? The road held no clue — it stretched away from him in two directions, either straight as an arrow's flight. The near hills were low, but numerous, and might have hidden anything from a strayed cow up to an army. The farther hills were probably

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

low mountains, and would be rather farther off than they appeared.

He let the horse choose. It walked forward, and he did not stop it, so it continued. It kept to the road, and forbore to snatch at the rank grass along the verges. They covered a Roman mile so, and then another one — he noticed the milestones as they passed them, tilted already by frost-heaves and hard winters.

The sky went darker still, and rain began to spit out of the pewter clouds. He put the hood of his cloak up against it, and the horse plodded on, untroubled if not delighted.

It would be hard to decide when night formally arrived. The road dipped, and made a turn that the Roman engineers must have had no choice about. A little flicker of yellow upon the left hillside caught his eye. He peered at the slope through the drizzle, and saw that one of the heaps of stone upon it had straight sides. Buildings, then. Thick walls, roofed with turf and furze. He saw that parts of the hillside had been enclosed by hedgerows and a fence of thorn, which kept a few soggy gray sheep confined. The light he had first noticed moved again, then held steady at its new position.

A farm. It was not abandoned, for all that the buildings seemed to be dissolving back into the hill. The sheep and the light assured him of that. Exhausted, chilled to the bone, lost so far as he knew, he resolved to beg a night's shelter, and legged the horse toward the turn-off.

To his surprise, the horse objected. It nearly unseated him, and did fling him hard against the saddle's high pommel. The blow to his stomach knocked the wind half out of him. He kept control with a firm hand and a firmer leg. After a moment of tossing its big head and stomping its great hooves about, the horse gave in. He could not see anything the beast might have taken fright at save the sodden sheep, staring at them with yellow eyes. Perhaps it disliked the uncertain mud, after the pavement of the road. Horses were fussy about their footing.

He halted the horse before the door of the house, and called out. In this lonely spot, trouble would find a welcome waiting for it. He did not wish for that sort of welcome. After a moment he got down off the horse — though he kept a good hold of the reins, in case the beast got nervous again.

A shape appeared in the doorway, rather more stooped than the low opening required. It was an old woman, wrapped in wool from the sheep penned outside — some of it spun and woven into colorless cloth and some still fleece and used for a cloak. She squinted up at him. Her mouth was crooked and sunken, with wrinkles around it as deep as those around her eyes.

He cleared his throat. His mouth was unaccountably dry, like nothing else in the dripping land.

"Mother, I must beg shelter of you. Night comes on, and I am half frozen with the mist and the rain. May I rest by your fireside, and put my horse in your byre?"

She stared at him silently, assessing him for so long a while that he honestly wondered whether she was deaf, or perhaps spoke only the Old Tongue. "I am a poor widow woman, and this is a poor steading," she wheezed at last. "Not some great castle, bound to grant hospitality to travelers. Go away."

He was sorely tempted to obey her. But the rain fell more determinedly, and in the dark of night he would probably lose the road within a mile. He would hate to do that, even though he had no notion where the Roman way was taking him. There could be bogs about, which would swallow him and his horse alike, without a trace left.

"Unless you can pay," the old woman added.

Pay? All he had was the tall horse, and the sword. Neither of which he felt he ought to part with. He knew already that he wore neither brooch nor ring — jewels which would be useless in such a pitiful place anyway. He had no food to share, no coin to offer her. Not even a tale to barter as a pastime. He was entirely at a loss.

"Or work," she said, staring at him. Her left eye had a cast in it. "For your keep. Do the tasks I set you, and you may have a bed by my fire, and a bowl of my stew."

He agreed eagerly, though for some reason every hair on the nape of his neck stood up as he spoke the words, and he thought that her face shimmered in his sight, shedding lines and years, taking on another shape ...

"Easy work, for a strong man like you," she said, looking as old as the wet hills, which were melting into the dark and the rain. "Fill the cauldron with water, sweep the hearth clean. Milk my old cow, and chop me wood enough to last this night and the next three."

He could do that, certainly. Any child could manage such work. Watched over by a crescent moon fitfully playing hide-and-find among the tattered clouds, he tied his horse alongside a gaunt red cow. He took the saddle from its back. The horse rolled a white eye at him in the darkness of the byre. It ought to have been glad to get out of the wet, not fussing about the accommodations.

He hung his sword, belt, and scabbard over the saddle. They'd only be in his way as he set to his chores, and he would not need a weapon. Metal chimed faintly as he set the blade down, and the back of his neck prickled again.

"The cauldron is too heavy to be fetching to the well," the old woman mumbled, thrusting a pannikin into his hands. "Your young legs won't mind making a trip or two back and forth with the water."

No, likely not. He followed her pointing finger, then a muddy path.

The well was natural, not man-dug. The water came up into a stone basin, its bottom lined with pale pebbles. A small green snake fled his approach without haste. He dipped the pannikin, and then carried the water back up the path and across the yard to the house.

The distance was more than he remembered, and the pannikin leaked. The cauldron sat ready over sullen flames, but he gave it barely enough water to wet its bottom. The drops hissed and began to boil away at once.

"You'll need to do better than that, if you want supper," the old woman cackled from the corner.

Stung, he hurried back out, and bumped his head on the sagging lintel as he went through the doorway. Next trip, he tried holding his fingers over the worst leaks, but the results were little better. By the time he got to the cauldron, the pannikin was all but empty.

Back and forth he went. Walking faster meant the water had less time to leak out, but as he kept stumbling in the muddy yard, he often spilled most of what he carried as he struggled with his footing. He lost count of the trips he made. He went. He came back. He did that over and over. Whenever he lifted his head, he saw the old woman's toothless mouth, laughing at him.

He was weary enough to lie down and die. The cold and the wet made his

hands swell. The reddened skin of his knuckles split. There'd have been pain, only he couldn't feel his fingers any longer. He fell to his knees beside the well at last, too dazed to rise again. He thought he saw the full moon reflected in the water, but when he lifted his head there was nothing in the sky save the dark gray clouds.

He needed something else for fetching the water. But what? He had spied neither cup nor bowl in his passages through the cottage, not so much as a deep-bowled spoon. The cow-byre hadn't a manger. The animals fed off the ground.

All at once, he bethought himself of his sword's scabbard. The notion was absurd — the leather sheath could not possibly hold more than a cup or two, if indeed it would hold liquid at all. But the sieve he was using fetched far less — he went after the scabbard, reeling in the mud, one step forward and three sideways.

He dipped the sheath into the water. On impulse, remembering other holy wells he had seen, he tore a scrap of cloth from his tunic's hem, and tied it onto a nearby bush as an offering to the goddess of the place. Then he bore the scabbard carefully to the cauldron.

Even near the fire, the low room seemed very dim. The light did not penetrate. He could see little. But he heard liquid splash into the bronze kettle — much liquid. When he looked into it, there was water brimming to its very lip. And then he grew unaccountably dizzy, and had to sit down, there on the dirt floor.

"No resting, now!" The old woman fiercely pressed a broom into his hands. "A proper mess you've made, with your tracking back and forth so many times. Sweep my hearth, and the rest of the floor while you're about it!"

Sweep. Aye, of course he could sweep, though she was not so old that she could not do that woman's task. He had agreed. He grasped the rough wood of the broomstick and used it for a crutch as he got to his feet. A splinter stabbed his palm.

Ignoring the petty pain, he set to work. There were indeed bits of straw scattered across the floor — he chivvied them carefully toward the doorway. And out, into the yard. And that was that. What had she said was next?

"You'll do it proper, or get yourself out!"

He stared at the old woman. Then at the floor. The broom seemed to have shed two straws for every one it had swept before it. The fresh-cleaned floor looked like a byre ready to be mucked out in the spring.

His face burning, he set about the task a second time, looking hard at what he did. Just as he got a tiny patch nicely swept, the broom dropped another couple of straws, but he gathered those up with his next stroke. No trouble about it. True, he might need to brush each inch of the floor twice and thrice, but it was a small room. He'd be done soon enough.

He swept, careful overlapping strokes. He caught up those bits he'd missed on the last pass. And the beaten earth stretched before him as if it had been the floor of the sea, endless, its edges hidden by dark and distance. Pale bits of chaff gleamed in it like stars.

His hands were as cold as the rest of him. They grew sore, but it was long before he noticed that they were blistered from the rough broomstick, On the inner sides of his thumbs, just above the second joint, the skin was rubbed back where the blisters had broken. The raw spots stung through the cold numbness. The broomstick sawed over them with every stroke.

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

He shifted his grip, but that only set fresh spots bleeding, all too soon. The broomstick was a gnarled branch, not especially straight. Protrusions remained all along its length, where twigs had once sprouted on the living branch. They seemed as numerous as the teeth of a carpenter's saw. He pulled his sleeve ends awkwardly over his hands, but they proved too short to protect him.

A brush of split twigs and coarse straw had been bound to the branch's lower end with a twist of twine. The twigs were old and dry, so they broke off and added continually to the litter on the floor. Strokes cleaned and dirtied both at once. He swayed unsteadily, then set back to work, but his heart sank inside him. A little snake flowed across the floor all at once, like a shadow. It was not in fear of his work, for it paused on the threshold and looked long at him, forked tongue flicking in and out.

He could sweep till the broom was bald as an old cat, and still the wretched floor would never be clean ... that bit there, where half a moon shone in through the doorway — he had swiped at it surely a dozen times, and still the bits of debris refused to shift at all. The more he worked, the worse it got.

So he bent, and picked the straws up with his bleeding fingers. At least that way he'd know where they were. He stooped again and again — then began to crawl about on his knees, as he found himself too dizzy to keep bending and straightening.

When his hands were full of twigs and straw and chaff, he emptied them into the fire. The brief flare of light showed him a clean floor at last.

It showed another shape to the old woman's face, too, and a glitter of ... displeasure? ... in her narrow eyes. But he was not sure — the firelight dazzled his eyes, and he felt very unwell for a moment. As he recovered, a pail was put into his swollen, blistered hands.

"The cow wants milking now," the old woman decreed. "And mind you don't spill the milk — I want every drop, to make curds for cheese."

He staggered away toward the byre, beneath a nail-paring of a moon. He scarcely wondered at the pail, which would have been so much more useful before, when he was fetching water. The injunction not to spill the milk, he understood — the cow looked ancient as the farm wife, and every bone in her was poking through her mangy red hide. If she wasn't actually dry, she was surely very close to it. He might find that he could milk her into a thimble, with room and to spare.

There was no light for him to work by, save whatever came in through the door. Night had not entirely settled after all — he could make out rough shapes within the tiny byre. Stumbling across a three-legged stool, he settled himself upon it, positioned the pail, and felt for the cow's bag.

The udder was warm, and far rounder than he'd ever have guessed. It felt full as a ripe peach. She *did* want milking. It would bring the cow comfort, and the old woman *might* actually be able to make a cheese — especially if she had kept back the previous week's milk.

The cow's switch, heavy and stink-

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

ing with manure, lashed him hard across the face. Startled, he jerked back, tipped the stool and fell on his back in the muck. He heard his horse snorting and shifting, and realized he was lying under its belly. Luckily, it had a horse's normal aversion to stepping on unusual objects, and did not trample him.

He righted himself, sought and eventually found the bucket. He used his cloak to wipe his hands, and then his face. He settled again, his forehead pressed to the cow's warm hairy side, reached for a teat and squeezed it gently to draw the milk down. His ear caught the welcome hiss of the milk-stream squirting into the bucket. Then he felt the cow shift, just as he squeezed downward a second time.

He grabbed for her leg as she kicked, but he could only weaken the blow, not check it. Her hock banged him on the jaw, and she caught the pail on the backswing with her hoof, after he had lost hold of the leg.

He retrieved the pail from the yard, and waited for the stars dotting his vision to fade into his more familiar dizziness. The byre was dim as his wits, but the big moon showed him an angry gleam in the cow's eye. She tossed her crescent horns at him and lowed sadly.

How did one make a cow stand still for milking? Distract her with food, he supposed. That was what he'd do with a horse that hadn't been taught to stand, if he wanted to trim its hooves. Well, no, he would twitch a horse, use the discomfort of a rope tightened over its nose to hold it in place. If he tried any such thing with this devil of a cow, she'd certainly hold her milk back to spite him, not let a single drop of it down. There was more to milking than having her stand still for it.

But unless she *would* stand still, he could do nothing. He found a grain bin, but no grain. The hay in the mow was so poor, he thought the cow might be more willing to nibble the old woman's broom. He found a few stems of dead grass at the edge of the yard, and those lasted the cow while he seated himself again, and got the pail where he wanted it. He braced the container against his foot, and held it with one hand. He tried to milk into it with the other, which proved extremely awkward.

The cow got her hoof into the bucket that time, so he had to wash the pail out before he tried again, while nursing a shoulder that was numb from still another hard kick. Elderly the cow might be, but her bones were wonderfully hard, and she was agile as any cat.

He could find no more grass. He thought to wear the cow out with patience, which only got the bucket kicked over another half dozen times. He felt that the midpoint of the night must be near — if it was not past. He was so weary that he moved in a sort of light doze, only kept from sleep by the cold. His toes were like stones in his boots, except when the cow trod upon them and they raised dull protests.

He tried milking from the other side, in case the cow was somehow used to that. If anything, her aim was truer from that side. And still the pail was no more than damp, where a little milk had spattered in, more by accident than design. The green snake he had seen licking up drops beside the overset bucket had probably gotten more.

If only she would keep her cloven hooves on the ground. If he could restrain her somehow — her head was tied, but that did not restrict her feet in the slightest. Even if he hobbled her hind feet together, he thought she'd still be able to have the bucket over, and there was nothing in the place he might tie her legs to.

Well, there *was* his horse. He removed the stirrup leathers from his saddle, and hobbled one of the cow's legs to the opposite one of the horse's. Then he did the same with the other mismatched pair. The cow looked suddenly suspicious. The horse looked horrified.

He needed to milk from what he still assumed to be the wrong side, for he could not very well have reached the udder from the far side of his horse. The cow tried her usual tricks at once — but whenever she stirred a leg, the horse leaned the other way to secure his own balance, and held her fast. Her hooves might have been nailed to the floor. Right hand, left hand, he began to milk.

The steady hissing of the milk entering the pail began to change, as the milk-stream hit something other than wood. A pale pool formed at the bottom of the container, round as a moon. The level rose and rose, till it nearly touched the wooden rim.

Carefully, he set the pail in the corner, then loosed the horse and the cow from one another. The scent rising from the warm milk reminded him of his hunger, and the supper he had been promised, but he did not steal a single sip, not even to stop the milk from slopping out. Instead he set his feet down with the greatest care, and took the brimming pail safely into the house at last.

The old woman said not a word to him. Her mouth was set so tight, her lips had vanished. Both her eyes squinted. She thrust a hand axe at him, and gestured mutely toward the heap of logs waiting to be split.

Surely there was wood enough to hand already, for the cooking and to last the night? Why could he not split the rest in the morning, when he had eaten and slept, when he would have light to work by? But it was the final task she had named, so he set himself to it. He stood a chunk of wood upon the block, put both his hands on the axe-haft, and struck.

Instead of splitting a stick of firewood off from the log, the axe bounced back and nearly hit him in the head. He staggered wildly, losing the fight for his balance and sitting down hard in the mud. His right arm was numb, as his left had been after the cow had kicked him. It was slow to regain sensation or strength.

He supposed he ought to have checked the axe's edge before he tried to use it — obviously, the blade was dull. He tested it with his thumb, without harm.

The crescent edge would not have cut butter. He drew a bit of sarsen from his pocket, and stroked the whetstone along the axe's business edge. He'd assumed the metal to be rusting iron, but the farm was evidently poorer than that — the tool was bronze. He could smell the copper tang in the metal as he worked on the edge, taste it like blood at the back of his throat.

Bronze weapons had been no match for the iron swords of the legions, but wood was only wood. Bronze could certainly cut it. Bronze axes had hewn down every tree the druids of Britain had permitted the common folk to cut. Bronze tools had shaped the great standing stones. All one required was a fresh edge ...

Between one stroke and the next, and *still* the axe would not cut properly. He hewed off a chip or two, then a hearth-length, but he was dripping with sweat, and what he had so far produced would keep the fire in fuel for no better than half an hour. He was bidden to prepare enough for that night and the next three. He chose another log, and started as a

snake fled from beneath it, across the moonlit yard.

He kept at his task, even though his arms wearied and weakened and he knew an accident was coming. Time upon time the axe smote amiss, or hit a knot, or bounced rather than cutting, as if it had been a hammer. He bruised his arms and struck his knee, and had it not been for his boots he would have lost toes and had a wicked cut on his right shin. He scraped and honed with the sarsen stone, but the axe would not hold any edge he gave it for so much as a heartbeat. Even on the first stroke, it never cut cleanly into the log.

Yet the axe would, he was certain, be only too pleased to cut his leg off. Or his hand, while he struggled to balance the log to be cut from. His fingers seemed always to be in harm's path. It was full dark now, he could not in the least see what he was doing. For all his exertion, the sweat that drenched him, still he felt cold. He had ice in the marrow of every one of his chilled bones.

He wanted to sit. By a fireside. He needed to soak up warmth, and light. But there was no fire for him — unless he could cut the wood to feed it.

If he could only split this little bit before him, which had perhaps once been part of an apple tree. Apple was far from the hardest of woods, surely he could manage it. Apple was not oak. He no longer cared about a meal, promised or not, earned or not. He only wanted to be warm, just for a little while.

He fetched out his sword, because he wanted a tool in his hand that he could trust. It was no proper use to put a fine blade to, chopping wood with it. He would mar the weapon's keen edge, dent or chip it beyond what he could mend with the whetstone. But the sword was steel, and it kept the edge the smith had put on it at its forging. Its grip was a comfort against his palm, like a handclasp.

He lifted the blade high, sighted — then smote the block of hard dry wood standing before him.

The satisfying *clonk* of a hearth-length falling unseen into the yard met his ears. He lifted the sword again, not pausing.

After a few more moments, he was stacking the firewood he had readied. He was so weary, there seemed to him an impossible amount of it — he bent and lifted and carefully piled it up, neat and ready to hand beside the door.

He wound up with a whole row of it against the house wall, as high as his waist. He carried the final armload into the house and set it down beside the hearth, which shimmered like a soap

bubble in his sight. When he knelt down, it was because his knees buckled and would no longer support him.

"Done," he croaked, his mouth dry as ashes.

"*Yesss*," the old woman hissed, as if she was hardly pleased. She jerked her filthy skirts angrily away from the wood.

He paid her strange behavior little heed. He stayed by the fire. The stones of the hearth were warm, warm as a mother's arms. He sank down into that comfort.

He opened his eyes to the buttery yellow glow of firelight, and the star-like white flames of a dozen candles sparkling about the room. Their light seemed to increase the darkness about them, but he made out a drape of white linen upon a small fat-legged table, and the chalice-shape of a silver goblet.

A woman knelt across the hearth from him. As he watched, she turned and arose, gracefully transferring a bowl to the table. It brimmed with whatever it was that bubbled in the cauldron hanging on the fire-crane. His nose thought it might be stew. She turned. He forgot the food. She raised her eyes to his.

They were pale green in the fire's light, like peridots, or Roman glass. Their gaze went through him like an elfshot. He felt an odd pain in his chest, as if his heart had faltered. He paid it no heed. He did not care if it stumbled. He did not care if it stopped.

He stared at her, holding her gaze as if the touch of their eyes had been a handclasp. He did not draw a breath. Breathing would have been an interruption. She was dark and light, white skin, black hair. The firelight was blessed to touch that skin, that hair, he thought — wanting to do likewise.

She did not look away, nor modestly drop her eyes. She did not even blink. Her lids were half moons, perfectly echoing the shape of her brows above them, the skin fine as poppy petals. They appeared to serve no purpose save symmetry, for they did not shade, they did not veil. Such staring should have looked bold, and rude — save that he was still staring back at her, just as intently.

Her hand slid into his, and led him to the table. She seemed to glide rather than stepping, whereas he stumbled and staggered as if he were quite drunk. All courtesy, she commended him to a bowl of stew, and bread still smoking-hot from the oven, and a plate piled with red apples. The drink in the goblet was cider blended of apples and pears both, cool over the tongue and warm lying in the belly. No matter how heartily he ate, or drank, the bowl and the cup seemed always to be brimming, inexhaustible.

They conversed while he dined. Afterwards, he never could remember what they spoke of, though he was

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

convinced the discussion had been pleasant. Her voice was sweet as raindrops falling into still water.

He clearly remembered the warmth of the fire, and those unblinking green eyes. Her lithe arms went about him, and then her cool lips were on his. Deep, deep inside, a place where he had always been alone opened to admit another soul, the missing half of his own.

Her mouth tasted like honey, and milk. Her tongue brushed his lips playfully. Then her mouth abandoned his, to lay dozens, hundreds of tiny kisses on every part of his face — his lips, his eyes, the line of his jaw. They clasped and clung, in the firelight. She drew back slightly, and he reached out for her ...

He rolled over, reaching, and rolled into the cold clear light of a frosty morning. No door prevented him from crossing the threshold — it had gone to splinters and gray dust, long since. The cottage walls were scarcely one stone standing upon another, and the thatched roof sagged in wherever the wind had not torn it away. In another season, the earth would swallow the place entirely.

His horse stood in the yard, stamping restlessly. His sword hung from the saddle on its back. He looked about with rising alarm, but he knew as he did that no other living thing was there, anywhere. No cow. No old woman. No one else. The back of his neck prickled in a familiar way, and his hands and feet went cold. The tip of his nose felt like ice. *Enchantment ...*

Motion drew his eye. The tail of a green adder vanished between two mossy stones. And then there was truly nothing more to see, so he mounted the horse and rode away.

He could still, as he found the Roman road once more, taste honey in his mouth.

❄

Susan Dexter is female, 40s, owned by two dogs and one horse, friend to several really nice cats who live at the barn where the horse rents. She has been writing since 1978-79; her first book **THE RING OF ALLAIRE** came out from Del Rey Books in 1981. She has had seven fantasies out from Del Rey in all, the most recent being **THE TRUE KNIGHT** in 1996. Her short fiction has appeared in the anthologies **EXCALIBUR** and **ONCE UPON A TIME**, as well as *the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. She has sold articles to *The Writer and Horse Illustrated*, and she has been an irregular contributor to *The Ricardian Register*. She co-teaches a monthly writers' workshop at a Little Professor book shop and holds down two part-time jobs,

Photo by Sally Dexter

which is par for the course most "full time" writers have to chart. She writes: "Martha and Jenkin have been with me for fifteen years or more, series characters who somehow never got a series. They live in the world of my first trilogy, and I'm sure they've had many a thrilling adventure—I just don't seem to be privy to any of them except this, the first one."

Michael Kucharski lives in Michigan where he works as an illustrator and graphic designer at the Detroit Historical Museum. He has been entering competitions and showing in galleries and art fairs since 1991, and has been working as a professional illustrator since 1977. He first became involved in science fiction and fantasy in the late sixties, and has since worked for many book and magazine publishers.

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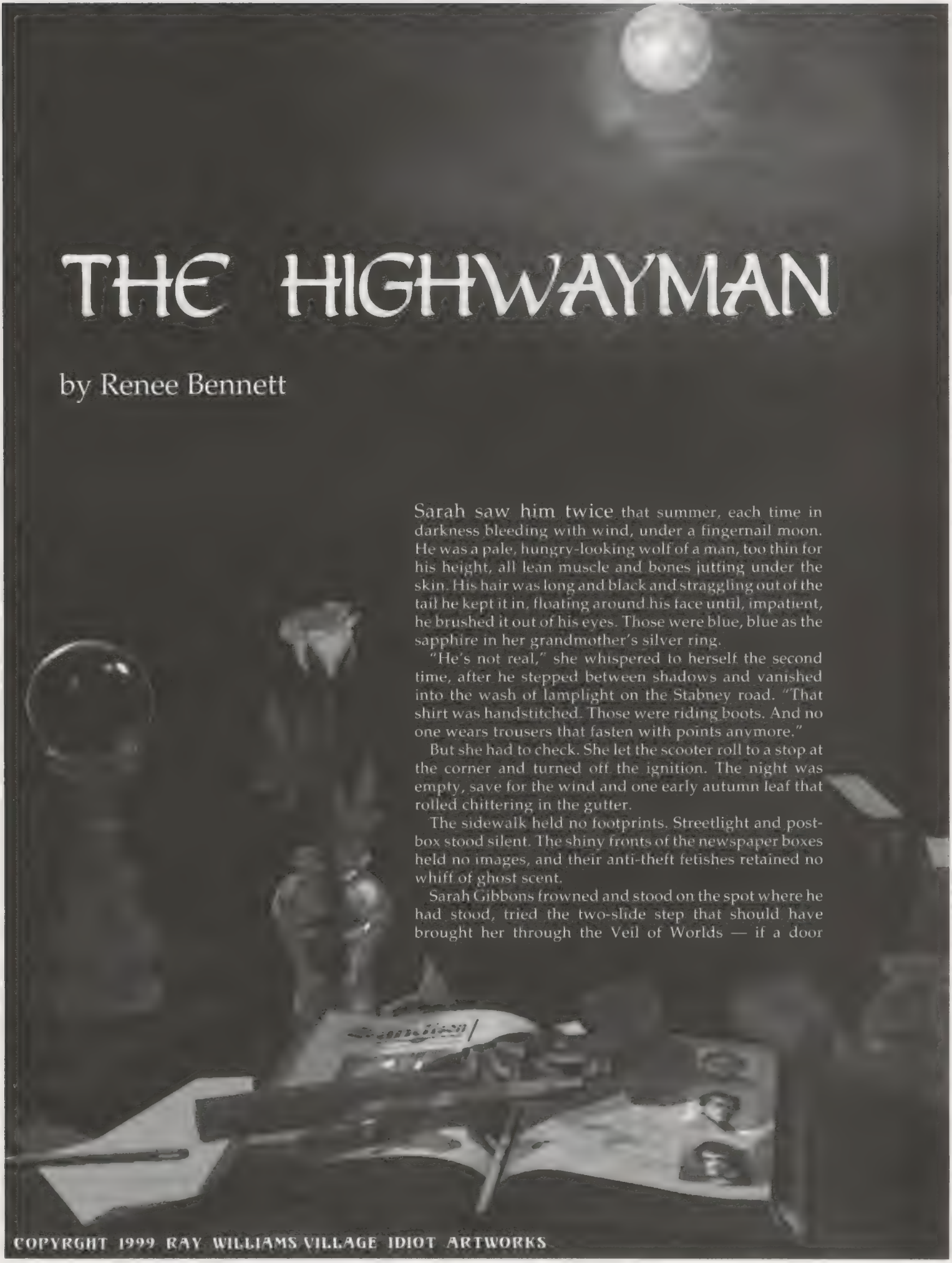
THE HIGHWAYMAN

by Renee Bennett



Sarah saw him twice that summer, each time in darkness bleeding with wind, under a fingernail moon. He was a pale, hungry-looking wolf of a man, too thin for his height, all lean muscle and bones jutting under the skin. His hair was long and black and straggling out of the tail he kept it in, floating around his face until, impatient, he brushed it out of his eyes. Those were blue, blue as the sapphire in her grandmother's silver ring.

"He's not real," she whispered to herself the second time, after he stepped between shadows and vanished into the wash of lamplight on the Stabney road. "That shirt was handstitched. Those were riding boots. And no one wears trousers that fasten with points anymore."

But she had to check. She let the scooter roll to a stop at the corner and turned off the ignition. The night was empty, save for the wind and one early autumn leaf that rolled chittering in the gutter.

The sidewalk held no footprints. Streetlight and post-box stood silent. The shiny fronts of the newspaper boxes held no images, and their anti-theft fetishes retained no whiff of ghost scent.

Sarah Gibbons frowned and stood on the spot where he had stood, tried the two-slide step that should have brought her through the Veil of Worlds — if a door

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between were present. There wasn't.

The sound of motorcycles running in a pack growled up the night. She made a ward sign, quick and practiced, and the sound turned away onto a different street, rumbling back down into the voice of the dark. She forgot them, whispered, "A Thinning?" into the wind. "A glimpse into what was ...?"

The plastic grips of the scooter's handlebars were cold and smooth as she got back on the little bike. "History Thins, here," she said. "Why would my History and his attract each other?"

The wind gave her no answer. The only omens were ordinary ones, leaves spiraling from the trees, the scooter's headlamp startling a black dog, a late moth suiciding in the flame of the gas lamp in her garden, as she opened the gate and pushed the scooter through.

She frowned at the lamp, caught between thoughts with the scent of burnt moth wings in her mind. Then she shook her head and went inside.

Sarah spent the week in the library, going through monographs of local history and the watercolor sketchbooks of generations of bachelor maids and spinster men, each one more determined than the last to record the little glories of their undistinguished families. Brown hair and blonde, grey eyes and green, skins freckled or cursed with acne from schoolmate jealousies. He was not among them. Finally, reluctantly, she took down the oversized tomes of the Sandisons of Bronton, Barons Bronton.

His name was John Alfred Siarl Sandison, third son after George and Percival, born in 1806. He was something of a ruffian and more than something of a rake. She could taste Sir Percy's disapproval in the hand-inked lines of text, set down in 1831 after Sir George's death by apoplexy. But there was also a grudging admiration, laid in the lines of the watercolor plate that accompanied it. It showed all three Sandison sons, strong, brown George and slim, alert Percy, and John, dark and smirking like a crow beside them. The date was 1821, the year George inherited. John was fifteen.

He was dead four years later, shot by his oldest brother as a common thief. His bones lay under the Bronton-Stabney crossroad.

Sarah spread her hand over the watercolor, until her fingers occulted the older faces, leaving only John's. Eyes as bright as Indian sapphires stared back at her from the page. She leaned forward and a long curl of her own midnight hair fell off her shoulder to circle his face.

"So, grandfather," she whispered into that little space bounded by hair and paper. "So. Will I witness your killing?"

The paper did not answer. She slammed the book shut on her hair and had to open it again, and ... did the smirking crow-face wink at her?

She glared at paint and paper, blue eyes to blue. The smirk never wavered.

She slapped the book shut again and did not catch her hair.

Autumn exploded yellow and orange and crimson on the trees, fired dry leaves against windowpanes until they rattled. Summer packed and left, though it came back to visit in the long afternoons. Winter was already prowling the shadows. Frost silvered the hedgerows at dawn.

It did Sarah no good to haunt the Bronton-Stabney crossroad, stretching spells of safety and wards of aversion, but she did. She lingered on her way home from the Medical College, or chose to use the postbox on the Stabney-Bronton corner, rather than one closer to home. She memorized the shapes of the curbs and the touch of the wind, curving around a milliner's shop and a druggist and a cleaners and a television repair shop. Their good luck charms clashed magics, a scent like ozone in the air. They were common magics, not very strong.

She sat her scooter in the middle of the intersection during the small hours of each night and watched the moon wax full and portentous, then begin the slide back to dark. Sometimes she heard the growl of motorcycles in the distance. Once she hid in the alley as black leather and chrome and red glowing tail lamps flowed past like a river.

She didn't know what she would do. John Alfred Siarl Sandison had died, musket shot, at nineteen. Her own age. She could only come to the intersection at midnight under the fingernail moon, and see what there was to see.

When that time came, he wasn't there — yet. She slipped off the scooter and patted her pockets, then paced to where he had stood. The wind touched the milliner's and then her cheek, bringing the scent of vanity with it. She shook the promise away and turned a circle on her heel.

He was there, in the space between apothecary and repair, tall above the sidewalk, with birch shadow across his face. A glint limned a horse's dark eye beneath him. He stared over her head, east up the road toward Bronton Seat, blue eyes icy under the rim of a broad black hat. His black wool cloak flung tatters behind him. He pulled a flintlock pistol out of the folds of the cloak and checked it, his eyes rising to watch the road.

Sarah did the two-slide step between, not blinking, not taking her eyes off him. The wind's odor changed from petty merchant spells to wet oak leaves. Blackberry brambles spidered around her knees. She was two steps off the road. He had not seen her yet.

She opened her mouth to say his name, and was thwarted by the thunder of hoofbeats. John laughed and surged out of the birch thicket, his bay horse huffing and bouncing stiff-legged in annoyance. He spun the animal around and saw her then, lifted a brow in surprise. Then the hoofbeats crashed louder and he jerked the horse's head to the east.

"Damn you, John!"

John Sandison laughed. "Good evening, George! It's a bit windy! What brings you from your warm hearth?"

George Sandison fought his foaming mount to a standstill. "You do, you brazen blackguard. You thieving cutthroat!"

"I beg your pardon, Sir George. I've cut no throats, merely purses." John bowed in the saddle. Sarah could see the crow's smirk on his wolf's features.

"The one will follow the other. Both are hanging offenses."

"I shan't hang."

They stared at each other. John broke the silence between them. "You should have let me go to soldiering, brother."

George growled and grabbed for the musket by his side. Sarah yelped and crashed out of the blackberries, snatched at the bay horse's tail. The wind hissed as the bay threw a hoof by her ear. Then it reared, John hauling back the reins and forcing it up, his head turned to look for her, his mouth open to shout curses or warnings, she didn't know which. The musket banged.

John dropped his flintlock, shocked, loosed his grip on the reins and slid backward into her arms. The bay squealed and leaped forward as Sarah

staggered two-slide steps back the way she had come, blinded by billowing black wool and the smell of blood.

Petty merchant magics crackled in her nose as she tumbled to the sidewalk with John. He was heavy with shock. She muttered and shoved him off her, drew out the first bandage from her pocket and stuffed it in the gaping wound in his chest.

Blue eyes blinked at her. "He cursed me to the land," he said quietly, each word a Truth Rune in the air, a ward against pain, elegant as old lace. "Because prophecy told him that if I went to war, then his house would burn, the river would run dry, and all his fields would sprout stones."

"Done," she told him, stuffing a second bandage after the first. "The manor burned in 1854. The river was dammed for power and flood control in 1932 and is now a maze of canals and fish ponds. And we're in your best wheatfields, paved over for businesses and parking lots." She snatched her cell phone out of her other pocket and punched the emergency number.

"Oh," he said, blinking at the dates. Then, "Where's my war?" and passed out.

"You sent me to hospital? I could have died!"

Sarah paused by the door. Four days had passed. He looked more like a crow and less like a wolf against the white sheets of the ward bed, despite surgery and the life-giving magics that worked so well on his inbred aristocratic body. She shook her hair back and stepped to his side.

"This isn't 1825," she said. "Hospitals are professional and they have rules. They don't hire mad nurses and crazed orderlies anymore."

He tilted his head to peer at her out of one eye, crowlike. "They gave me a paper to fill out and sign. I seem to be married to a Sarah Gibbons. I seem to be a changeling snatched back from the feys, from under the hill."

"I am Sarah Gibbons. And you are a changeling, close enough."

"I do not recall taking you to wife, Lady Sarah."

"I lied."

His eyes twinkled. "How disappointing."

"You are my grandmother's great-great-grandfather, on the wrong side of the blanket," she said stiffly, and watched his face fall into lines of true disappointment. She let the silence stretch between them until he was willing to break it.

"You brought me here. Why? More important, how?"

"I don't quite know. Your bones are buried at that crossroad, according to your brother Percy."

He winced. "George would do that." He sighed and stroked a hand over the blanket, smirked. "When he cursed me to the land, I cursed him to daughters, you know."

"He had five."

John laughed. "He must have died of apoplexy."

"He did."

He looked guilty, then wry. "We should thin the aristocratic blood with common stock more often," he said, smirking his crow's smirk. "Thinned, it carries less magic, less power for cursing."

She sat on the end of his bed. "Not thin enough, in you."

He smirked, but there was no humor this time. "My bones aren't lying at the crossroad. Will you take me back?"

She stood up and headed for the door, too angry to answer.

"Percy cursed me, too."

That stopped her. She noticed the paint on the edge of the door was cracking.

"Because I killed our mother, being born, he cursed me to finding my heart's desire in my sister's face."

She turned to him. "You have no sister."

The smirk was there. "I was twin-born. They gave her to the feys."

She fled the room, the hospital, found her scooter in the parking lot and fled the grounds, rode until she was in the Bronton-Stabney crossroad amid the light and noise of midafternoon, shoppers and travellers swirling around her. She parked the bike and fed the meter all her quarters, then walked until her feet hurt and the lamps were coming on.

Artwork by Ray Williams

"I should have known by the Truth Runes," she said, standing by the side door to the druggist, amid a welter of herb scents and merchant spells of health and bought beauty. "He was too good at them."

She was good at them, too. At all spells, glamors and paradoxes alike. Her adoptive grandmother had said it was because she had lived among the feys.

"Well. That might be part of it," she told the wind, and smirked a crow's smirk.

He called her scooter a pony when she came to fetch him out of hospital.

"A fat, slow, dependable pony," he said, grinning and stroking his hand down one handle and across the cheerful red tartan seat. "A sensible mount for a gentlewoman."

Sarah eyed him, annoyed. "It's a three-mile walk, if you would prefer that."

John held up both hands in mock surrender. He looked more roguish than usual in her spare helmet. "I'd be delighted to share your mount, Lady Sarah." He grinned far too broadly and straddled the seat. "Like this?"

She got on in front of him, felt his arms go around her and refused to stiffen at the contact. The little bike chugged under them as she turned out of the parking lot.

John asked questions, some of them intelligent, some of them impertinent, most of them amusing. Once he said, "Stop."

She looked where he was pointing, shook her head and bent over the bars of the bike, speeding past the tavern with its parking lot full of motorcycles. A rider in black and white lightning-striped leather straightened and watched her go by.

John was quiet the rest of the way home. "Steeds and chargers," he said, hanging the second helmet on the back of her bike, as she opened the garden gate.

"Ex-lovers," she said back to him, and while he was still shocked, "I broke an oath to them." She turned away so she wouldn't see the look in his eyes and left him to close the gate.

He found her other bike, of course.

She came home to find him muttering over it, smiling, with a polishing cloth in one hand that he hadn't needed to use. It was another week later, and the look he turned on her was crow thin, but the wolf was there, too, gleaming in his bones as the health returned to him.

"A fine hunter," he said, and grinned.

She sighed, relenting. She doubted she could refuse him much. Truth lay between them. They were alike and growing closer, two halves to one whole. She had noticed it in the way they finished each other's sentences, in the way they would both raise their heads to the same sound. She wondered, for the first time, if others saw wolves and crows in her face.

He learned like she learned, leaned into the wind and grinning because speed was a drug, and he was hooked on it.

And because she wouldn't refuse herself when she couldn't refuse him, she bought another motorcycle, twin to the other. That made him laugh.

They rode. She showed him the wide boulevards and the narrow alleys, the streets that slumbered in small family peace and the roads that blazed with red neon life. They went out into the hills and came back again, burning down the moonlit highways like Arawn and the Wild Hunt, hounds after bloodscent.

No, she thought, turning the image

aside. No. Never hounds.

Autumn darkened and winter crept closer, razoring the trees bare of leaves and turning the air dry, until a sneeze could start the nose bleeding. John's wolf came out more and more, devouring his new world in great gulps, newspapers and books and television and theater. He learned dishwashers and light switches and the postal system. He thought it all splendid.

One day he put a newspaper down in front of her nose. The article told of a man beaten to death and hung on a chain-link fence. "Does this happen often?"

She was looking at the name of the dead man. "Isaac Payton," she said.

"Tell me about him."

No refusing. She told him about Isaac and the smell of rain on gravel, about running the streets and throwing stones through plate-glass windows. About police chases and parties, about taking three lovers a night, just because she could.

"Someone did this to Isaac," he said gently, at the end of it.

Sarah sighed. "His name is Andrew Moesen, and I rode with him for a year, while I was wild seventeen. He calls his gang Moesen's Hounds. Or sometimes just 'The Pack'."

He nodded, as if it were only to be expected.

Winter came, white snow and sleet slicking asphalt and making cobbles treacherous. She showed him how to ride winter, how to put the bike into a fall and walk out of it. She kept each word cool and complete between them, which seemed to baffle him.

On the last day of Autumn, Llwyd Caswallon was waiting for her in his lightning leather jacket as she came out of the Medical College.

"Moesen wants you," he said, and she threw her book satchel at him. She was on her bike and gone before he recovered.

Where to go? There wasn't a good answer, because now the Hounds had her scent. She'd hidden it so long, under medical school and the smell of the scooter, under stillness spells and no-see-me wards. She could feel the tug of Llwyd's mark. He was the Hound's best tracker.

She could tangle the trail with glamor spells, cross and recross her own scent until it would take them all night to find the right one. By then, she could be anywhere, a big city, and they would have to start all over, finding her. That would work. She could do that.

Until she found John in the middle of an intersection, his arms crossed on his handlebars and his chin resting on them, watching her come. He was good at finding her. He had no need for tracking.

The Hounds circled in. It was the Stabney-Bronton crossroad.

"Moesen and his Hounds," she said.

"Arawn," John said. She did not correct him. He grinned at Moesen as the man rolled his motorcycle to a stop in front of them. "You know, my bones are supposed to be buried here."

"I'll oblige you that much," said the brown man. The Hounds tittered among the shadows thrown by the streetlight.

"I've no need of charity," John replied. Sarah watched the Hounds close in, drawing in from the four directions. "Besides, a real man fights for his victories. I challenge you to a race."

Llwyd and Moesen looked at each other. "Which of us, boy?"

John spread both arms wide. "All of you."

Sarah looked at him, caught the crow smirk in his eyes, though he was all wolf to the Hounds. She thought of midnight racing, the wind in her hair, his laughter drawing her through the streets. She leaned back on her own bike and grinned like the madwoman they'd once called her. That settled Moesen's mind.

"All of us," he said, and swept an arm out to include the Pack. "If one of us catches one of you ... you lose."

John shrugged and tugged his helmet on. "Na. You lose." He gunned his bike and was off like a deer, Sarah in his wake in a breath, through the still loose cordon of Hounds. The roar of their engines was wild laughter above the cursing of Moesen behind them.

They split, and the Hounds split after them, darkness screaming between their teeth. Sarah cut down an alley, crossed a greenbelt, then raced the wrong way past the police station, scattering little glamors behind her like stars. One of the Hounds drove after one, slamming through the doors of the station. She laughed.

She met John, rode down a straightaway until their two clumps of Hounds joined. She split away again. Through the arcade on Merchant Square, down the steps to the Metro. More glamors. Two Hounds missed the turn at the bottom and rode their bikes onto the tracks. She heard the squeal of a train coming, caught a glimpse of them scrambling back onto the platform. She rode up the stairs again, to the sound of outraged pedestrians and splintering motorcycles.

She found John. He had found a rose somewhere, was gripping it in his teeth. He grinned and gave her one of her own.

Split and combine, split again, until the Hounds bled away in confusion and defeat, until only Moesen remained. Sarah waited in the middle of Stabney and Bronton for him.

He glowered at her. "I wanted you," he said. "I had you."

"You had the wind." She threw the words at him, watched them pierce him like darts.

"I could take you now."

She smirked, and knew the crow looked out of her eyes.

Moesen growled and swung his bike away.

John wheeled up to her minutes later, grinning from losing his last Hounds. She was still savoring her victory. "We should have done this long ago," he said. "You could have done this long ago, but you wouldn't let me near."

"You didn't ask what my curse was!"

He blinked at her, startled. "You're cursed, too?"

"By the feys! When I left them, they said to me, 'May your nearest be cursed to wander always'!"

"Oh, that," he said, and shrugged. "I think I'll become a policeman," grinning and panting into the dark. "A motorcycle patroller. There's a war to be fought here, on this land."

She looked at him and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

❄

Renee Bennett lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Despite the name and residence, she is neither French nor Canadian. She is a member of the local speculative fiction writer's group, IFWA (Imaginative Fiction Writers Association) and it pleases her to be known as an Ifwit, even among strangers. Her degree is in Linguistics, her houseplants are dying (again), and 'The Highwayman' is her first professional sale.

Ray Williams has won numerous awards at conventions and art shows all over the United States. In 1995, he entered the field of children's book illustration. He lives in Longview, WA, with the obligatory cat and several airbrushes.

Artwork by Ray Williams

THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

by Chuck Rothman

Miss Grimm's cottage lay back from the road, nearly hidden among the trees of the forest. Margaret approached it warily, looking again at the decorative scrollwork near its roof. Gingerbread, her mother had called it. Gingerbread...

This had to be the right place.

The door had no bell, just an ornate brass knocker shaped like a horse. Swallowing, Margaret lifted it and dropped it three times.

The door opened only a moment later, quickly and noiselessly, startling Margaret. She involuntarily took a step back, but managed otherwise to suppress the urge to run away.

The old woman squinted sourly at her, as though she resented being called to the door by a young girl. Margaret couldn't begin to judge her age: her face was wrinkled and leathery, with a small wart growing near the corner of her mouth. Her hair was wispy thin on her small head. "What do you want?" she asked.

Margaret swallowed. "You're the witch, aren't you?"

Miss Grimm looked surprised. "What kind of way is that to greet someone?"

"You're a witch," said Margaret. "And I need your help."

"What makes you so sure I'm a witch?" Miss Grimm said.

"Of *course* you're a witch," Margaret said. "Everyone knows that."

"Never believe what everyone knows," the witch said. "That's my advice to you."

Margaret nodded. "Yes, ma'am." She had never used that last word before, but it seemed the right thing to do now.

"Now, why do *you* think I'm a witch?"

"Because you *are!*" Margaret spoke fast. "You live in a cottage in the woods covered with gingerbread and you have a name from all the fairy tales and you don't have a TV or anything electric and ... and you have a wart!"

Miss Grimm rubbed the wart on the side of her face and smiled. "A sure sign, eh? You didn't mention I was old. Most people think that age has something to do with it."

"You do magic. Mark said he saw you once make a rose bloom in winter. You touched one of your rosebushes and it blossomed."

Miss Grimm looked thoughtful. "Who is Mark?"

"He's my brother," Margaret said.

"Maybe Mark was pulling your leg. Brothers like to do that, you know."

"Mark wouldn't lie! Not about this!"

The witch was thoughtful for a few moments. Finally, she said, "Come on in and I'll see what I can do."

Margaret followed inside. The room was dim, lit only by what sunlight filtered in through the trees. The shadows were frightening, but she tried not to think about them as she passed through. Margaret wasn't sure if she could spot any electric lights or not. Piles of old newspapers lay stacked all over the floor.

They reached the small kitchen, its gas stove heating a small battered teakettle. An old wooden table was in one of the corners, surrounded by a set of wood chairs, the green upholstery on their seats tattered and thin.

Miss Grimm filled a kettle and put it on the stove. "What's your name, dear?"

Margaret swallowed. She had read somewhere about the power of names. "Margaret," she said hoarsely.

The witch put tea in a metal ball and placed it inside a black china cup. "How old are you, Margaret?"

"Twelve," Margaret said. "Thirteen in May."

"Isn't that a bit big to believe in fairy tales?"

Margaret felt herself growing angry. She wasn't a child. "You *are* a witch. Because you're right. You're *old*. And ugly!"

"Ugly?" Miss Grimm said.

Margaret realized she had gone too far. "No," she said. "Not ugly. I didn't mean ugly."

"Then why did you say it?" Miss Grimm didn't wait for an answer. "And why do you think you need a witch?"

For the first time, Margaret found a reason to hope. "Because of Mark."

"Your brother."

Margaret nodded. "He's sick. Very sick. He needed blood when he was a baby and...the blood was bad. AIDS. They say he's not going to get better." She had made a promise to herself she wouldn't cry, and was just barely able to keep it.

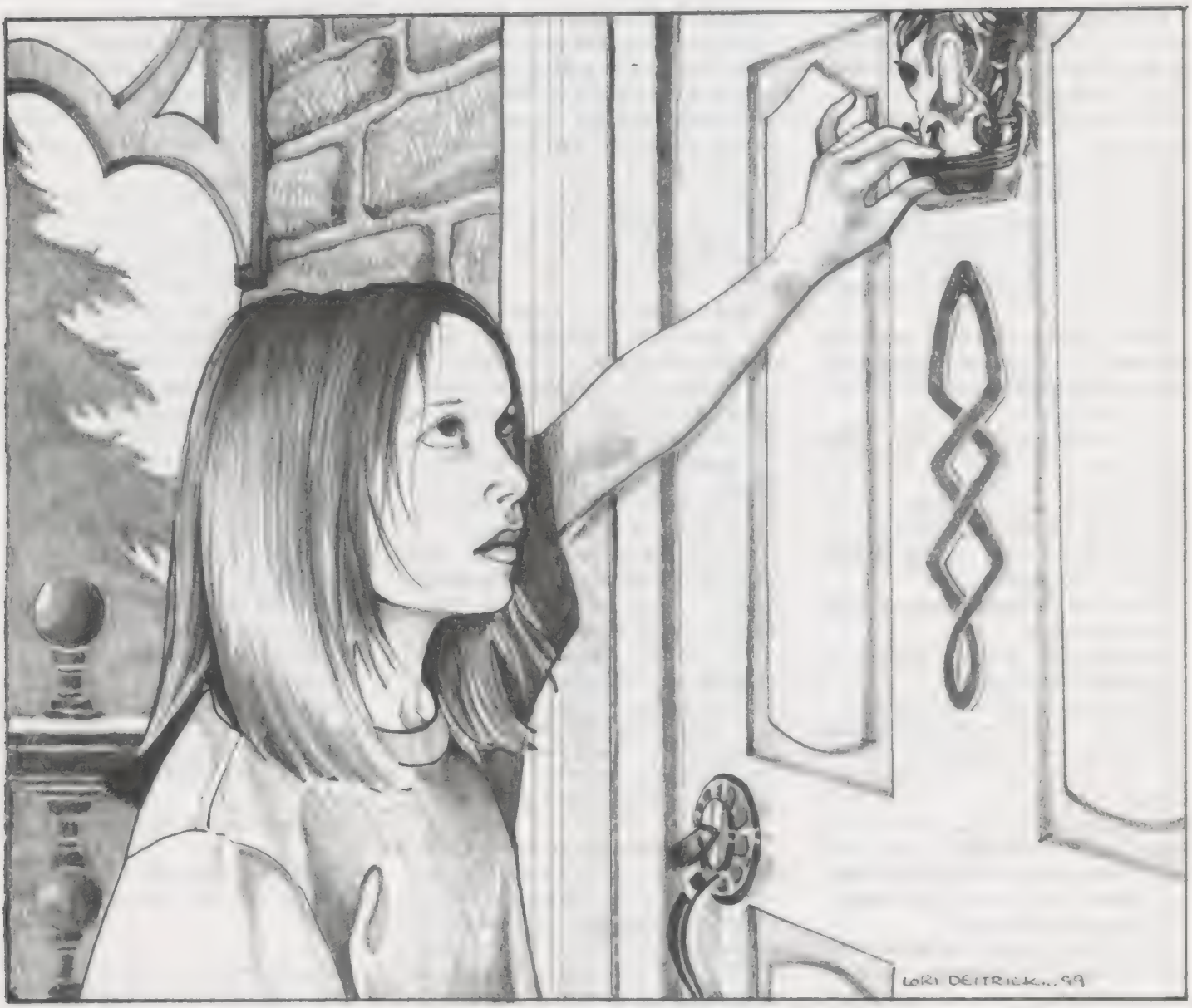
Miss Grimm's voice became very soft. "I see," she said, her words giving away nothing.

"Mark said that only magic could cure him, so I thought of you and ... and ..." Margaret had run out of breath.

"You thought I'd help you."

Margaret nodded.

Miss Grimm sipped her tea again. "You know that nothing comes free in life."



Margaret felt the beginning of elation, the first in a long while. She nodded rapidly. "I'll pay you whatever you want. I can ask my dad to help out, if Mark's cured."

The old woman shook her head. "I don't want your money, and I doubt your father would give me a cent." The kettle began whistling and she poured herself a cup of tea. It smelled sour, not like real tea at all. "Are you willing to learn from me?" she asked.

"Y-yeess," Margaret said.

"Your voice is full of uncertainty. That's good." Miss Grimm nodded. "You'll do, then."

"Me?" All Margaret could think was, Did witches really eat people?

"I need an apprentice." She tapped her head. "There's a lot of knowledge up here, things that can't be written down or they'll set the paper on fire. They should not be forgotten." She gave Margaret an appraising look. "Yes. You'll do."

"Then you'll give Mark his cure. That's wonderful!"

Miss Grimm lifted a finger. "First things first. You come back here tomorrow after school. You can begin your training then. If things work out — well, I'll see what I can do."

Margaret told no one about her promise. Mark was too sick to listen to her, and she knew not to explain things to her parents. They were too old to believe in witches.

Still, as she approached Miss Grimm's cottage, she couldn't help but be excited. An apprentice? Did that mean she would be learning magic, too?

Miss Grimm opened the door before Margaret could knock. "Right on time," she said.

Margaret followed her. "I'm ready," she said softly.

Miss Grimm nodded, then gestured at the living room. "First thing, we need to clean things up a bit. Why don't you gather up all the newspapers?"

Margaret frowned. "Gather?" She had been half expecting to learn a few simple spells.

"Sure. Clean them up. Carry them out to the garbage. I'm no good at lifting these days."

"But —"

Miss Grimm's eyes narrowed. "You *do* want something from me, don't you?"

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

Margaret thought about Mark. He had not looked any better today than he had in any of the weeks before now. "Yes," she murmured.

"Very good. There's a lot you can do for me, too."

She spent an hour lugging the newspapers from the room to the roadside. Miss Grimm stood by, occasionally saying words of encouragement, but more often pointing out that Margaret could get a lot more done if she would only apply herself.

Finally, the job was done. The room was free of newspapers. It was getting dark and the gloom seemed double in the lightless room.

"Very good for the first day," Miss Grimm said. "Come back tomorrow and we can do some more."

Margaret wanted to protest, but the narrowing of the old witch's eyes stopped that at once. "I'll see you tomorrow," she mumbled.

Tomorrow, Margaret helped wash the kitchen floor.

The day after that, she was put to work polishing the silver.

Then, a day of cleaning windows.

The next day, it snowed. Margaret arrived just as the flakes were letting up. Miss Grimm was waiting with a shovel.

"This isn't right," Margaret said as Miss Grimm was ready to send her home, the path now cleaned of white.

"You said you'd be my apprentice."

"But not your servant."

Miss Grimm shook her head. "You are too impatient, Margaret. You must learn patience."

"I didn't come here to learn patience," Margaret said. "I came to save Mark."

"All in good time," said Miss Grimm.

All her bottled up frustration came to the fore. "I don't *have* time. Mark is dying! He's getting weaker every day." She pointed a finger at Miss Grimm. "You made me a promise. You need to keep your word."

"Margaret ..."

"I don't even know if you *know* any magic! You're just taking advantage of me."

Miss Grimm was quiet for a moment. "Come inside," she said finally.

Surprised at the abrupt change of mind, Margaret followed.

Miss Grimm led her into the now-tidy kitchen. "You're right, Margaret," she said. "I made a promise." There was a cake server on the counter; she lifted its metal cover and took something out. "This will do for a start."

Margaret looked at what was in her hand. It was a small gingerbread house, its base about the size of deck of cards, with white icing that covered its roof like a fresh snowfall. Tiny candies decorated it, making it sparkle as the light hit it.

She looked back at Miss Grimm. "This will help Mark?"

"Yes," said Miss Grimm. "I think it will."

"But it doesn't look magical."

"Appearances are deceiving," Miss Grimm said, smiling. "Now, take it to your brother. It's very fragile; be careful not to break it. That would ruin everything. Make sure it's very safe."

Margaret nodded. "I'll keep it safe." Magic, she thought. Real magic. She took it in her hands. "Is there anything I need to say? Any magic words?"

"You're not yet ready for that. Just give it to your brother. Have him break it open." She waved a finger. "And don't you open it first."

"No, ma'am," Margaret whispered, handling it as though it were a precious jewel. She tucked it neatly into the pocket of her blouse, then said, very gravely, "Thank you."

Miss Grimm waved her away. "You should save your thanks for later."

Mark looked worse than ever — pale and gaunt, of course, but his skin had taken on a dry tone, like old yellowed wallpaper. One small plastic tube went up his nose and another dripped clear liquid into his arm. His eyes were shut as Margaret entered the room, carefully carrying the tiny present hidden in her pocket. She had kept her hand on it ever since she left Miss Grimm's house, afraid it would crumble if she let go.

She waited until her mother and father left to get some coffee. Alone, she walked up to her brother.

"Mark?" she asked.

His eyes opened weakly. For a moment they seemed to have a touch of animation, but that quickly passed.

"I have something for you." She held out the gingerbread house. "Miss Grimm gave it to me."

"Miss Grimm?" he asked, his voice weak and hoarse.

"The witch who lives on Forest Street."

Mark nodded weakly. "Don't believe in witches," he mumbled.

"She told me to give you this." Margaret took the tiny confection out of her pocket and held it out to him.

He stared at it. "Gingerbread?"

"Open it up," Margaret said. She felt as though any more delay would make the magic impossible. "Just break a hole in the roof."

Mark smiled. "OK," he said, and gently poked his finger through the top.

There was a sharp crackling sound, then a display of miniature fireworks lit the room: blue and green and red showers of color not six inches high. A sparkling white horse with bumblebee wings popped out among the bursts, whinnied, then flew figure-eights around the room, as an orchestra played a soft but cheerful melody. The smell of ginger and molasses filled the room as though something had been freshly baked.

"It's beautiful," Mark whispered.

Margaret smiled. "It will cure you," she whispered.

Mark didn't seem to notice. The horse had landed on his arm, and he stroked it weakly. "Soft," he said.

The horse whinnied.

Mark looked at his sister. "Thank you."

Margaret felt embarrassed by the attention. "Don't thank me. Thank the witch."

"You're going to have to do it for me."

"For now," Margaret said. *But you can thank her when you're better,* she thought.

Margaret ran up to Miss Grimm's house, out of breath from the trip. The snow of the past two weeks was barely shoveled from the walk, but she pushed her way through it and pounded frantically at the door.

It swung open. "Hello," Miss Grimm said.

"You lied!"

"Margaret ..."

"He's dead!"

Miss Grimm was silent for several minutes. "I'm sorry about your brother."

"You lied to me! You said the magic would cure him."

"Margaret," Miss Grimm said, firmly but with great gentleness. "I said no such thing."

"But I remember —"

"Margaret, please." Miss Grimm paused for a moment. "Come inside."

"No," Margaret said. "I won't set foot in your crummy place again! You

tricked me into cleaning up your stupid house! I *hate* you!"

Miss Grimm nodded. "I'm sure you do. But I told you that nothing was free. As soon as you got what you wanted, you stopped visiting me. Who was taking advantage of whom? Now, would you like to hear an explanation?"

"No."

"You don't? For all you know I may have your brother's soul in a little jar in the back of my cupboard, near the jellies. Maybe I can bring it back to life."

Margaret paused. "You're lying."

Miss Grimm shrugged. "You won't know until you come inside, will you, dear?"

She hesitated. This had to be a trick. The old witch didn't know magic in the first place.

"Well?"

"For just a moment," Margaret murmured. She stepped inside the house.

The rooms seemed a bit brighter than she remembered them. She followed Miss Grimm almost to the kitchen before she finally had to speak. "Do you really have his soul?"

Miss Grimm smiled gently. "No, Margaret. Though I did know he had died." She pointed.

The tiny winged horse flittered around the room.

"Peggy returned last night," she said. "Around nine o'clock. I guess that's when it happened."

Margaret nodded, blinking for a moment.

"I didn't lie to you, you know," said Miss Grimm.

"But you said —"

"I said I could help your brother. Help him, not cure him. Nothing could do that, I'm afraid. Not even magic."

Peggy flitted around the room, then landed on Margaret's shoulder. She felt her tiny hooves like a baby's fingers.

"You see, Margaret, magic is not very powerful. The spells are small things. Trifles, really. Tiny animals and the smell of gingerbread are the best I can do." Miss Grimm went to the brown wooden cupboard. "You expected something spectacular, but, really, Margaret, think about it. If we could do great feats, don't you think that everyone would believe in magic? Do you think I would live *here* if I could conjure up a castle? Do you think I choose to have little girls tell me I'm ugly?"

"No," Margaret murmured.

Miss Grimm took out an oatmeal cookie and handed it to Margaret. "I'm sorry about your brother. I couldn't save him, but I could help him. I could give him a little magic. Just enough to delight him a little bit in his last days."

"Delight him?"

"I'm sure he saw a lot of Peggy, didn't he?"

The tiny horse whinnied and nodded.

"There. You see?"

"It's not enough," Margaret said bitterly. "You gave him a little bit of happiness, that's all."

"*I* didn't give it to him. You did, Margaret. He wasn't thinking of me when he saw Peggy. He was thinking of his sister and what she had done for him." She sat at the kitchen table. "That's what makes magic: love, and a little delight. Sometimes even a small bit of love can be a great comfort."

Margaret was silent. She still felt as though her insides had been torn out of her, and yet ... and yet ...

Mark had seemed so pleased that she brought him Peggy.

Miss Grimm patted her back. "I know I've disappointed you badly. Unfortunately, life's full of disappointments, both big and small." Her face softened, and she seemed a long way away. "And it can be just as fragile as a gingerbread house. I discovered that when Paul —" She shook her head, then looked at Margaret. "You're not the only one to have lost someone you loved." She paused. "Will you still like to learn magic?"

Margaret thought. "I don't know," she said.

Miss Grimm nodded. "Fair enough," she said. "Come with me."

Margaret followed her to the back door. They stepped out into the winter cold.

Miss Grimm reached toward rosebushes, flowerless and inert. Mumbling something under her breath, she reached for the thorns. One dug into her finger.

A drop of blood dripped onto the snow. At least, Margaret thought it was a drop of blood. But as it touched the cold whiteness, it turned into a red rose.

"Here," Miss Grimm said. "For Mark. Take it to the funeral. It won't wither."

"Ever?" asked Margaret.

Miss Grimm smiled. "Take it," she said. "I'm sure your parents need you at home right now. Say the rose is from ... a friend."

Margaret took the blossom. It seemed warm, a living thing.

"You need time now to grieve. But when you feel up to it, I still could use an apprentice. That is, if you still want to learn."

Margaret felt the warmth of the blood-red rose. *A little comfort,* she thought. "We'll see," she said.

❄

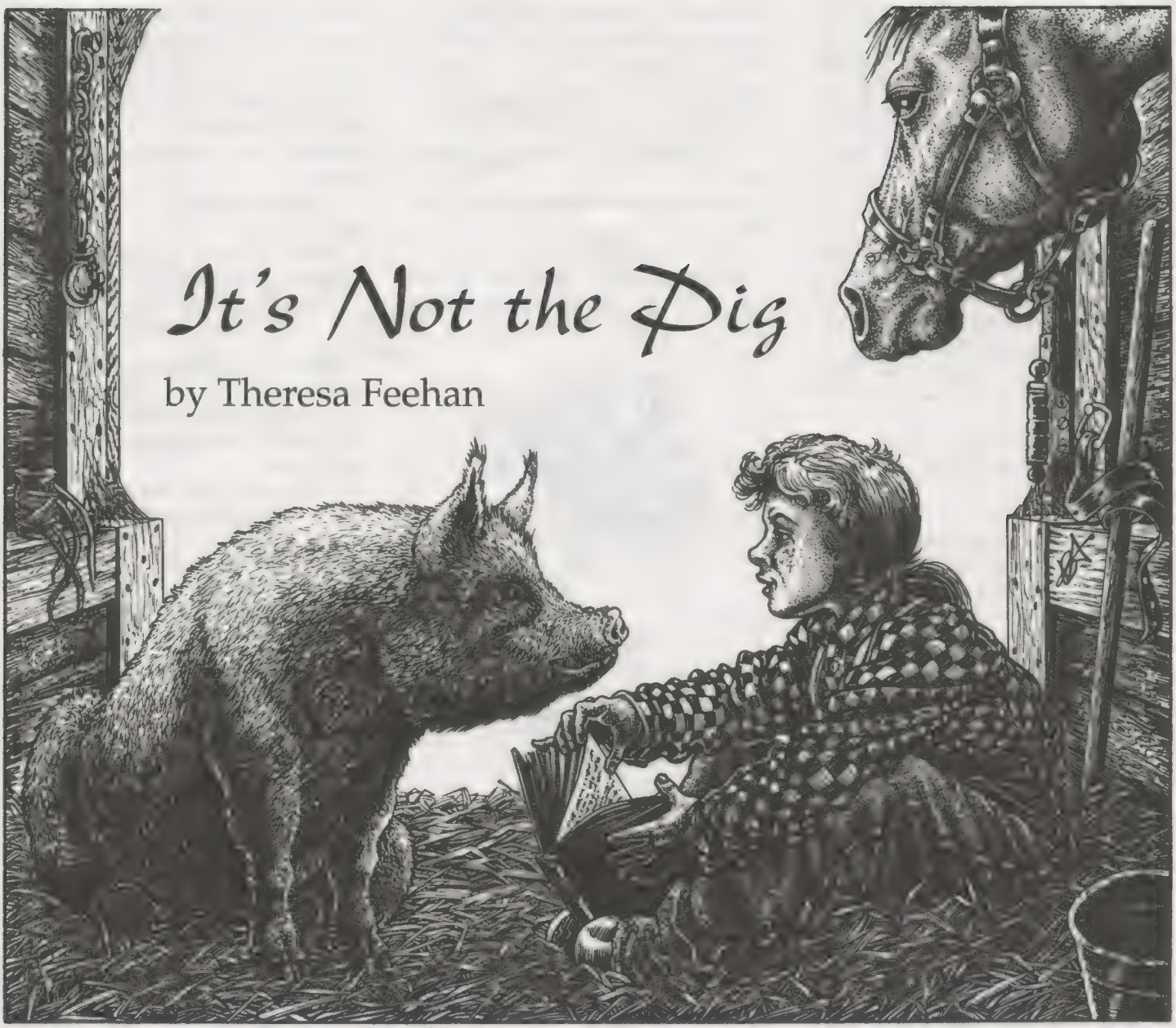
Chuck Rothman has been writing science fiction and fantasy since 1981. He is the author of the novel **STAROAMER'S FATE**, and his short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's, Fantasy and Science Fiction, Galaxy, Realms of Fantasy, Aboriginal SF,* and in the anthologies **VAMPIRES**, and **BLOOD MUSE**, among other places. He lives in Schenectady, NY, with his wife Susan, their daughter Lisa, and their cat Lightning.

Lori Deitrick has been published in *Aboriginal Science Fiction Magazine* and *Amazing Stories Magazine.* Her fantasy originals have won numerous awards and grace the walls in the homes of many collectors. She shares a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee with her artist husband David Deitrick and her three children.

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

It's Not the Pig

by Theresa Feehan



Artwork by Barb Armata

Alice Dabney tested the rope that bound her to her swivel chair. It was tight. Her fingers strained toward the knots but could not reach them. Rebecca Pratt stood on the other side of the desk with her head cocked to one side as if she were listening to something. A mottled brown and green spider climbed out of Rebecca's ponytail and started down her neck. The movement must have tickled the girl, because she squirmed and danced in a circling paroxysm of laughter.

"Well, I'll be damned," Alice thought, too drugged to speak out loud. "She was telling the truth all along. It's not the pig."

It was six days earlier that Principal Troxler knocked once on her half-open door and came in. He always knocked and came in simultaneously. It never occurred to him that someone might be adjusting her slip or something. "I have Sam Pratt outside," he said. "And Rebecca."

Alice groaned and let her gaze fall to her desk.

Principal Troxler said, "It's time you earned your keep around here, Alice. I want this girl back in school, and I want her back in school tomorrow. Understood?"

What she wanted to say was NO, I don't understand, and I never will understand, and God Himself couldn't keep Rebecca in school, but what she actually said was, "Yes."

"These Special Ed students are near and dear to my heart," Troxler said. "Don't let me down." On his way out, he tried to smile by way of sweetening the pill, but his beady little eyes betrayed him.

Okay, so he doesn't have beady little eyes, Alice thought. He's not bad looking in an official kind of way. I might even like him if I could do something right for a change. He does have big feet, though.

Sam and Rebecca Pratt came in as Troxler left. Alice stood up to shake Sam's hand across her desk. She said, "Hello, Sam. Hello, Rebecca." Rebecca's frown deepened, but she made no other response.

"I don't know what we're going to do with her," Sam Pratt said. He was a farmer, dressed in overalls, grease on his hands and in his thinning hair. He

noticed the smudge he had just left on Alice's hand. "Been working on the tractor," he said. "Sorry."

He passed his John Deere hat from his right hand to his left hand, then back again, over and over, in a rhythm as steady as a metronome. "This school thing is tough," he said. "Got plenty of work for her at home, but it don't seem right to give up on her just yet."

Alice had closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to watch the man's hat moving hypnotically back and forth. It took her a second to realize that he had no more to say. She opened her eyes and stared at Rebecca with what she hoped was a stern look. "May I speak to her alone for a bit, Mr. Pratt? Then you can come back in and we'll decide what to do."

"Yes, ma'am." Sam reached up and dropped the John Deere hat on his head in one smooth motion. There was a smile on his face as he turned to go. "See you in a bit, honey," he said to Rebecca.

Alice was familiar with Sam's smile. It transformed his face every time he thought someone else had just been conned into taking responsibility for Rebecca. He probably didn't even realize he did it.

Rebecca still stood sulking near the office door. "Don't you want to sit down?" Alice asked.

Rebecca shook her head without raising her eyes.

"Well, I do." Alice sat down and swiveled the chair to face the girl. "Why did you leave school early yesterday?"

Rebecca was small for her age, redheaded, freckled, with a round, silly looking face. She squirmed inside her dress, which was two sizes too big for her. "Nancy Tucker," she said as if Nancy Tucker were someone to spit on.

"What about Nancy Tucker?"

Again the squirming. Finally Rebecca said, "Nancy Tucker called me those names yesterday."

"Damn that Nancy Tucker," Alice said. "Oops. I shouldn't have said that."

"She made me cry," Rebecca said. "I ran away, and when I stopped running I was home."

Alice drew a small circle on her pad. She made two dots for eyes. She made a curving line for a mouth. She added some squiggles for hair. She wrote "Nancy Tucker" underneath. She balled up her fist and smacked the picture with the soft side of her hand. "That's what I'd like to do to Nancy Tucker."

"I'm not coming back to school," Rebecca told her.

"What?"

"I don't want to be the dumb one anymore. I want to be smart. Only I can't be smart. So I'm not coming back."

"But you've got to come back."

"Why?"

"Because ..." Alice searched her desk for the one something that would convince Rebecca to stick it out at school a little while longer. She didn't find it. "Because — because, how else are you going to get smart?"

"I know how to get smart," Alice said. There was a new look on her face, part coy and part shy. It was that "I've got a secret" smile every kid saves up for special occasions.

"Okay," Alice said. "I'll bite. How are you going to get smart?"

"I'm going to practice with the pig," Rebecca said. "And you don't even know what I'm talking about." A big grin lit her face and she did a kind of two-step. Then she spun around like a twister, and disappeared down the hall heading for the front entrance.

Alice sat unmoving for a full second. "Hey." She jumped out of her chair, ran around the desk, and followed Rebecca's dust into the hall. She never caught up to the child, but she did run into Sam Pratt and Principal Troxler. Neither one of them was glad to see her.

Two days later the phone rang during Alice's lunch hour. She was eating a salad at her desk, partly because she could not stomach the school cafeteria's food, and partly because every teacher in the school was teasing her about Runaway Rebecca. She decided not to answer the phone. It was her lunch hour after all, and she needed some time to herself. The phone rang five times before it stopped.

Mrs. Cooper, the Librarian, passed Alice's half-open door. The clack clack of her shoes stopped, which made Alice look up. Mrs. Cooper's face appeared in the doorway. She leaned in such a way that only her bright blue glasses and her disgustingly cheerful blonde curls were visible. "Your Rebecca was here yesterday."

She's not my Rebecca, Alice shouted, only she didn't shout it. She didn't even say it. She just stared at Mrs. Cooper with a forkful of lettuce halfway to her mouth.

"She was in the Library," Mrs. Cooper said, "and I didn't even know it. All of a sudden there she was bolting for the door with an armload of books."

"Books?" Alice asked.

Mrs. Cooper advanced a step into Alice's office so that her whole body could be seen. She wore a not quite too tight sweater and a trim little skirt with flat black shoes. She had probably waltzed by Principal Troxler's office on her way back from the cafeteria. "I was so surprised I didn't know what to do." She glanced over her shoulder to make sure no one was listening, then leaned forward and whispered, "I haven't told a soul but you. I thought you should know."

Alice's forkful of lettuce settled back down to the salad plate. "Picture books?"

"No. Novels. A whole row of Dickens. I just thought you should know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cooper," Alice said. Mrs. Cooper vanished into the hall. Alice finished her salad. What did Rebecca and Charles Dickens have in common?

The phone rang again, and she picked it up without thinking. "Hello?"

"It's me. Sam."

"Sam?"

"Rebecca's father."

"Oh yes. Sam. I was just thinking about Rebecca. How is she?"

"I'm worried about her. That's why I called. She's outside reading a book to a pig."

"Try to stay calm, Sam. Stranger things have happened."

"Maybe so," Sam said. "But somebody's got to come talk to this child, because she don't make no sense whatsoever any more."

Alice took a deep breath. If Special Ed students had not been so near and dear to Principal Troxler's heart, and if Alice had saved more than half of one paycheck, she would surely have told Sam to call the fire department or the National Guard. But what she heard herself saying instead was, "Okay, Sam. Now, how do I get out to your place?"

Alice pulled her once blue Volvo onto the Pratt place at 1:15 P.M. She hadn't told Principal Troxler she was leaving, but he would know she was gone soon enough. She probably had a line of kids waiting outside her office by now, and the ruckus was sure to bring Mrs. Cooper out of the Library. Alice did not care about all that. They were all nor-

mal kids (plus a more or less normal Librarian) doing normal things, and she could deal with them later.

Alice parked beside Sam's pickup in front of the barn. Her Volvo, rusty, dusty, and crusty, did not look out of place on the farm. It was already old when her dad gave it to her to start school with. If she could keep her job long enough, she would buy a bright red sports car.

Rebecca came around the corner of the barn as Alice stepped out of the car. "I thought that was you," Rebecca said. She had *A Tale of Two Cities* in her hand.

The screen door on the house squeaked open and closed. Alice had to squint through the sun to see Sam Pratt crossing the yard toward them. She nodded to him. "Hello, Sam."

"How do, Miss Alice. My, ain't you a pretty sight."

Alice registered the compliment, but decided to file it under "I" for irrelevant. She turned to Rebecca. "So how do you like the book so far?"

Rebecca frowned, as she usually did when asked a question. "I guess it's okay," she said. "But the pig likes it a lot."

Alice looked at Sam. Sam said, "See what I mean?" He lifted his John Deere hat, probably to let some hot air escape, then settled it back in place.

Rebecca said, "I can read now, Miss Alice. And last night I read the cookbook and fixed Pop a dinner. Didn't I, Pop?"

Sam nodded. "Right good dinner too. That old kitchen's been missing a woman's touch."

"I think it's great that you can read, Rebecca," Alice said. She turned to Sam. "Why is it a problem?"

"It's the pig," Sam said.

Rebecca pouted. "It's not the pig, Pop. He don't read the book. I do."

Sam tried to look parental. He waggled a finger at the girl. "Don't you be scolding your elders now, young lady." He glanced at Alice. "She don't learn the best manners with just her and me on the place." He turned back to Rebecca. "Tell Miss Alice what you told me."

"What did I tell you?" Rebecca asked.

"About who got smart."

"Oh." Rebecca held the book at her waist and faced Alice. "The pig and the horse got smart first. Then I got smart."

"You want to see the pig?" Sam asked. He held out a soiled brown hand as if to guide her to the sty.

Alice took a step back toward the Volvo. The only thing she could think of at that moment was how easily pigs can transmit diseases to humans. "Is the pig sick?" she asked. She felt silly the instant the words were out of her mouth.

"It's Big Bill Number Ten," Sam said. "Never been sick a day in his life."

Alice did not ask about Big Bill Numbers One through Nine. "How do you know when a pig gets smart?"

"It talks," Rebecca said.

"It grunts kind of different lately," Sam said. "Rebecca pretends to understand it."

"I do so understand it," Rebecca said.

Alice took another step toward the car. "I have to get back," she said. "I have students waiting to see me."

"What about the pig?" Sam asked.

Alice shook her head. "I don't know anything about pigs, Sam. If she thinks he's smart, and that helps her read, then I'm all for it." She threw herself in the car and pulled the door shut.

"It's not the pig," Rebecca said, and stamped her foot.

"What isn't?" Alice asked.

"The one who's smart," Rebecca said. "It's not the pig." She pouted again and would say nothing more.

Alice started the engine and got the hell out of there.

The next day at noon, with her mind very much on Rebecca Pratt, Alice opened her lunch container. She stared at her green leafy salad, unable to reach for her fork. "I hate salad," she said. "Why do I do this every day?" She swept the whole mess into the trash can, fork, salad, and container. She stood up to go she knew not where, just somewhere, anywhere away from school, anywhere fun. Maybe she and her Volvo would never come back.

Rebecca Pratt stood in the doorway with a large brown shopping bag hanging from her hand. "I brought you some ice tea, Miss Alice."

Rebecca seemed to be Alice's old Raggedy Ann doll back home in Indiana with her red hair, her freckles, her calico dress. It was so odd to see the doll pull a jar of homemade tea out of her brown bag. "Do you have a glass?" Rebecca asked.

Alice looked around her office. "No glass," she said.

"You can drink right out of the jar," Rebecca said. She giggled. "I always do." She took the top off and handed the jar to Alice.

Alice accepted the jar, and swirled it a bit to stir up the contents. She stared at Rebecca. The girl's face was different, her look more focused, her mouth less worried, more determined.

"It's good tea," Rebecca said. "I had some myself. Try it."

Alice took a sip. The tea was sweet and lemony. Just the way she liked it. She said, "Did Sam come with you, Rebecca?"

Rebecca shook her head. "Just me. Have another sip."

Alice took another sip. The feel of the jar was pleasant, reminding her of summer days when it didn't seem right to bother with tea cups and other such fancy stuff. She tilted the jar back and drank deep.

"I think you should sit down now," Rebecca said.

Alice sat.

Rebecca removed a length of clothesline from her bag. She tied Alice to her chair with it. Alice's arms hung limp at her side. While she was working on the knots, Rebecca said, "It's horse tranquilizer. Pop gave me some once when I wouldn't mind him."

Rebecca backed away to survey her handiwork. Satisfied, she sat down in the chair across the desk from Alice. She said, "Miss Alice, if you came out to my Pop's farm and you didn't know anything about farms or people or anything, which animal would you think was the smartest? Which animal would you want to be?"

Alice mumbled something even she couldn't understand.

Rebecca said, "I used to think the horse was the smartest myself." She noticed the office door still standing open and swung it closed without getting up. "But some people might think the pig is the smartest, because the pig never has to do any work, but the two-legged creature comes and feeds it every day anyway. You can see how they might make a mistake."

"They?" Alice tried to focus on Rebecca's face, but without success. The whole room was a blur.

"So, one of them tried a horse, and one of them tried a pig. They were both wrong though. Pop was the smartest animal on the farm. I guess I was second. Anyway, the one in the horse gave up and got onto me when I was riding just for fun. It would have got onto Pop, but Pop don't ride anymore."

Alice let her head loll toward the

clock on her desk. Was lunch period over yet? Surely someone must come knocking on her door any minute. She tested the rope that bound her to her swivel chair. It was tight. Her fingers strained toward the knots but could not reach them. Rebecca stood up all of a sudden, not talking now, her head cocked to one side as if she were listening to something. A mottled brown and green spider climbed out of her ponytail and started down her neck. The movement obviously tickled the girl, because she squirmed and danced in a circling paroxysm of laughter.

Rebecca stretched out her arm to touch Alice's desk. The spider scooted down to her wrist and then jumped off onto the desk top. Alice, none too fond of spiders to begin with, watched the thing crawl toward her with growing horror. She used her feet to push her chair as far from the edge of the desk as possible. Her trash can teetered once, twice, then fell over and wedged itself under the chair.

Rebecca shook herself like a dog coming out of water. When she saw the spider at the far edge of the desk, getting ready to leap for Alice, she let out a whoop. "No, no, NO!"

The spider put up one leg like a bent periscope pointed at Rebecca. Rebecca lunged for the spider. "Mine. Mine." The spider jumped away from Rebecca's hands, but in its haste it missed Alice and fell on the floor upside down. Rebecca shrieked. Alice pushed herself as far from the spider as she could get, which wasn't very far because the trash can still wedged under the chair wouldn't let her get around the corner of the desk.

As the spider righted itself, it spotted Rebecca coming after it on all fours. It hustled under the desk, out of reach for the moment. It put up that periscope limb again, turning it from Alice to Rebecca and back to Alice, evidently trying to judge the distances involved.

Rebecca crawled over to Alice and crouched in front of her like a hockey goalie. "It's not fair," she said. She glanced at Alice to see if she was listening. "Just 'cause I'm a little slow doesn't mean he should go looking for somebody smarter. I was doing better. Look at that big book I read to the pig. I never could have done that before."

The spider moved sideways trying to get closer to Alice without getting too close to Rebecca. Rebecca tensed, ready for a leap.

There was a knock on the door, a single rap. Principal Troxler swung the door open and came in. "Alice? What's going on in here?"

Alice tried to yell "Help", but all that came out was "Humph!"

The spider started a run for Alice. Rebecca jumped for it with cupped hands. Principal Troxler stepped aside so as not to be run down by Rebecca. The spider dodged Rebecca, made a leap, bounced off the wall, and landed under Troxler's oxford.

Rebecca's eyes went wide and her mouth formed an O. When Troxler took another step forward, Rebecca, still on hands and knees, stared at the dark spot left behind on the carpet.

Troxler noticed the rope around Alice. "What the hell?" He hurried around the desk, and turned Alice's chair so he could get at the knots. He fumbled with them, but could not get them undone.

Rebecca turned so that she and Alice were looking directly at one another. Troxler was opening Alice's desk drawers. "Where do you keep your scissors?" He wasn't paying any attention to Rebecca.

Rebecca said, "Are you okay?"

Alice nodded yes, although why she did so she couldn't say. She was definitely not okay.

Artwork by Barb Armata

"I didn't want to do it," Rebecca said. "But it wanted someone smarter so it could get home sooner. I'm not in trouble, am I?"

Troxler found the scissors and sawed at the rope. Alice's head nodded forward because of Troxler's motion. Rebecca smiled and said, "Thank you, Miss Alice."

Rebecca turned to go, then stopped in her tracks. "I just remembered," she said with a look of delight. "There's still one in the pig!" She went into the hall and shut the door behind her. Half a second later the door flew open again and Rebecca stuck her head in. "Miss Alice, I'm going home and I'm going to get smarter and smarter. And when I'm just as smart as anybody can ever get, then I'm coming back to school, and that's when we'll see about that mean ol' Nancy Tucker." She turned on her heel, slammed the door, and was gone.

Troxler finally cut through the rope and put the scissors down. He unwound the rope and spun the chair so he could see Alice's face. "How in the world did you let this happen?" he asked.

Alice tried to speak, but her tongue was too thick. Later, when she could talk again, she would tell Principal Troxler two things. First, she would tell him that Rebecca would be returning to school one fine day, thank you very much. And second, she would tell him that the tea was really, really good, and he should try some.

❄

Theresa Feehan is a mother of four grown children: a pharmacist daughter and three sons with golf careers. She spent fifteen years working for the Washington, D.C., branch of the Warner Brothers Film Distribution Corporation until automation took its toll. Now that the kids are grown and she is no longer working, she quilts, writes, and cooks. She has so many projects she wonders how she ever had time to work and raise a family. She lives with her husband in Sykesville, MD.

Barb Armata has lurked on the edges of the sf-fantasy art world for many years. Primarily a self-taught artist, she has illustrated for many publications, most frequently for these pages. Her paintings have been displayed at both World Science Fiction and World Fantasy art Shows, and can be found on many collectable card game cards.

Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Blood Evidence" by Barbara Tarbox**
- 2nd Place: **"Dragons, Domestiques et Sauvages" by Patricia Russo**
- 3rd Place: **"Grey Wolf's Tale" by Richard Purtill**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Vincent Di Fate for "Dragons, Domestiques et Sauvages"**
- 2nd Place: **April Lee for "Absinthe Eyes"**
- 3rd Place: **George Barr for "Grey Wolf's Tale"**

The Cauldron ballot is on page 64 - vote for your favorites. (A photocopy is okay if you don't want to cut up your copy of the magazine; please, only one ballot per reader.)

foolscap

June 11 - 13, 1999 Seattle, WA

Octavia Butler
Paul Chadwick

Guests of Honor

Foolscap is a conference celebrating science fiction, fantasy, comic books, and art... in short, works that can be done on foolscap (a piece of paper). Foolscap will:

- explore the connections and contrasts between these subjects;
- look for like and unlike minds to challenge and quiz;
- provide a forum for serious and frivolous discussion; and
- furnish a venue for writers and artists to meet publishers, agents, and art directors.

Convention Hotel:

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Rates: $96/sgl, dbl, twin • $116 quad • $165 suite

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How to Join:

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Just send $35.00 with a completed membership form to P.O. Box 2461, Seattle, WA 98111-2461. Membership form available on the Foolscap website:

http://www.alexicom.net/foolscap/title4.htm

LETTERS

Sarah Gilmer, Martin, GA

I appreciate the Royalist sympathies of eluki bes shahar; however, she is a little mistaken in her information on the British Queens.

Henrietta Maria of France was the wife of Charles I and mother of Charles II. Charles II married the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza.

eluki surely knows; I must have made an error when transcribing the interview. My apologies to eluki and all our readers. — reh

Michelle Chapman, Werombi, NSW, Australia

From my address, you will know that I am Australian. However, you may wish to know more about me before you consider publishing my work.

I am 25 years old, and my life so far has revolved around reading — I have been an insatiable reader for as long as I (or my parents!) can remember. Having excelled in English essays and exams during my school years, I chose to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree at Sydney University, majoring in English Literature since 1600. This allowed me to obtain formal qualifications while indulging my love of literature. I have recently completed this degree and am now studying for Honours in the same field. My exam and essay results have been consistently high — I have maintained a Distinction average, which requires marks of more than 75%.

I have gained great personal satisfaction from my academic achievements. However, if I am to continue dedicating my life to literature I must gain practical experience as well. For years I have concentrated on literary theory and analyzing the work of others. Now I hope to find out whether my own work is of a competitive standard — I need to know whether I have enough talent to make a living from doing what I love most! I do not expect you to answer this question for me on the basis of a single story, but any comments you make will be greatly appreciated. Of course, if you do decide to publish my story I will be ecstatic!

Thank you for your consideration. I eagerly await your reply.

Ignore "literary theory" — just tell a good story. — MZB

L. C. (Lucy) Jacobs, Los Banos, CA

I am sending in my vote for my favorite writers and artists from your issue #40.

I hope it's not too late to cast my vote. To tell the truth, I had a very difficult time deciding how to number the tales, and also the artists' work. Everything in the issue was so superb. Very excellent selection of work, artwork, and literary work. In fact, if I could just give stars to all, I would!

My special favorite continues to be Patricia Russo, who never fails to weave her spell over me. She pulls this reader into her special world immediately. She makes me feel that I am in the room with her characters. I love her characters, and they stay in my mind. She writes about them with a clean, vivid use of language and I can feel the characters' emotions at the same time that I can enjoy the writing itself. A treat for me, to see two Russo tales! Thanks so much for that special treat! And for an altogether wonderful issue!

Anne M. Marble, Ellicott City, MD

I thought the latest issue was fantastic. After all, I was in it!

I got an early Christmas present when I bought the latest issue of *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine.* I opened it while I was in the car. (Don't worry, I wasn't driving!) When I realized that you were publishing a new article about grammar guidelines, I was thrilled. I thought, "Maybe she's going to excerpt my e-mail about grammar." WOW. You printed the whole letter, even though it was long. You even printed the anecdote about the sign in the bookstore.

That was a great article, and not just because you printed my letter. Everybody who contributed had some great comments. You have some smart readers. :->

Honest, one of these days, I will send you one of my stories. I just have to find one that's short enough. Not to mention good enough!

Raul keeps track of the Cauldron votes, and just before each issue goes to press, he gives me the results for the previous issue. Votes after that don't count, though we do read any letters that accompany the ballots. — reh

Robyn Patricia Bennett, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Hope the move went well. Thank you for the complimentary copy of #39; I'm still bouncing off the ceiling. Sorry it took a while for me to write and thank you, but I have been busy, and I thought I'd be nice and not send you more stories to read while you were moving.

Sorry I missed the World Fantasy Festival, it sounded like a lot of fun. Floor loom? Okay, I'm curious. And if someone could explain how to set up a table loom, I'd be happy. Maybe you could run several columns up to the next Fantasy World's Festival? When is the next Festival? One important question though: how smoky are these Conventions/Festivals? And do the laws vary from state to state? I'm highly allergic and don't believe I should pay for a puffer to make my lungs tolerate something that will kill me. Also, I understood from the MZBFM web page that there was dancing? Set dances? What kind? And does one have to be a contributor or just a subscriber to attend these events?

Okay, enough questions. Enclosed please find my next story. Have a happy and healthy holiday season. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Our convention wasn't the World Fantasy Convention; perhaps that confusion was part of why we didn't get more attendees. That convention was held in late October last year in Monterey; ours was Fantasy Worlds Festival, in September in Berkeley. The next one will probably be held in 2000.

We strongly discouraged smoking anywhere (in fact, Berkeley law may prevent it anywhere in the public parts of a hotel) since so many people have breathing problems when tobacco is used.

Dances were taught by Catherine Myers of PEERS, a local history group, and included several historical periods and various styles, including ones where nobody needed a partner.

Re. weaving: I have posted an article on my website about weaving, at ***http://www.alexicom.net/rholmen/weaving.htm****, or follow links on the mzbfm page to my page and then to the weaving article. I even drew pictures. — reh*

L. Butler, from the Net

It is clear by your rejection of my story, "The Confessor", that you did not even read it. Your rejection letter stated that you failed to understand the direction of it within the first paragraph. I would point out that, if you had read the story, you would have understood its direction and scope, within the first four lines. I appreciate your critique about the size of my right margins, and I suspect that this is the true reason for my rejection. This is a bit too harsh, don't you think? I understand that you are busy people, but come on!

I assure you that Mrs. Bradley did read your story (she reads everything), but obviously she either failed to understand it or simply had too many 5000+ word stories in her slush pile that day. She really does prefer shorter lengths, and she may simply have meant that the first few pages were not sufficiently compelling for her to want to buy such a long story. She has been known to say that you have to reach out and grab the reader by the throat in the first paragraph and not let go until the story ends.

I am perfectly certain that she did not reject your story because of the size of your right margins — that's not the sort of thing she notices. Rachel Holmen is the one who criticizes such technical details, so if there was a hand-written note on your manuscript about your margins, that was from Rachel.

While our form letters with the pre-written paragraphs may not always perfectly express just why a story is being rejected, those of us "privileged" to hear Marion's verbal reactions to a story feel that the form letters are preferable to inflicting her initial impressions upon innocent writers. She once picked up a first draft of something I was writing and said "If this is your view of reality, you belong in a mental institution." After several minutes of questioning I realized that what she meant was that too much of the story was still in my head and not enough was on the paper for it to make sense to the reader, but her initial comment hurt me so much that I still remember it over a decade later. (And I never finished that story, either.)

I am sorry if her rejection of your story upset you. She really does want to encourage new writers, that's the whole reason she publishes the magazine. Obviously "The Confessor" was not quite on her wavelength, but that doesn't mean it's not a perfectly good story that a different editor would not be happy to publish. Try it on another market, and good luck. — ew

L. Butler

Thank you so much for your **gentle** reply to my e-mail regarding "The Confessor". You were very kind when you could have just disregarded it. I also appreciate your retelling of a painful rejection within your past as well. As it did not deter you, this last one will not deter me. I will continue to submit, not only to *MZBFM*, but others as well. I can do nothing else.

It was a harsh, but truthful, rejection of my first story submitted to your magazine that forced me to improve my writing skills. I was grateful for that then, and I am likewise grateful for your kind words now. I am still thankful and admire MZB. Now however, I also have another writer whose path I can follow. Thanks again.

PS: You will have another story from me soon.

Rejection is hard enough — an editor doesn't need to rub it in. — MZB

L. Butler

I send to you my third submission in the hopes you find it worthy of paying me for it. I must tell you, it took me a full thirty minutes to get over your last two rejections of my stories; however, the time you, or one of your editors, took to offer me pointers has led me to this recent work. I am grateful. If this story does not meet your current needs, then I promise you will have another written by my hands soon thereafter.

Thanks for your time, and your stiff critiques, they have made me a better, soon to be published writer.

*As long as you **did** get over them. Best wishes. — MZB*

Jennifer J. Smith, Wilkie, SK, CANADA

I thoroughly enjoy your magazine. The interviews are fascinating and the tips for writers very helpful. It is the stories I enjoy the most, for certain, As a stay-at-home mom of a twenty-month-old boy, in small town Saskatchewan, it is delightful to let your story magazine take me to fanciful places. Keep up the good work.

Susan Wilson, from the Internet

Short letter. Great magazine. More please.

Scott Stoddard, Plano, TX

I'd like to thank you once more for your latest response to a submission of mine. I found a measure of validation in your assertion that my story was good, and I think I do understand that, in the final analysis, you cannot really put a finger on what is right and worthy of publication. You know it when you feel it.

I'm working from a different agenda however, as you well know. I'm determined to publish both short and long fantasy before I shuffle off this mortal coil, and I understand that the best way to realize these goals is to help you in your capacity as an editor: to help you help me!

I do submit all around, of course, but among the pro markets, you are the editor who is also an esteemed author, so I am perhaps biased toward your magazine. And you read the work yourself. I've mentioned that before.

So without further ado, I'll continue my steady stream of submissions. I've subscribed, and I intend to study your magazine intensely to get a sense of that feel you mentioned. I know I can write a story for you, and to that end I will bend my efforts. After all, I need the break! And I promise that when you do finally launch my career, you will not regret having done so.

I fully expect to be publishing stories soon from L. Butler and Scott Stoddard; such persistence and professionalism is bound to pay off someday. (But no, we haven't bought a story yet from either.) — reh

Moving?

Your subscription copy of *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine* may not be forwarded by the Post Office. If you don't send us a change of address notice, your issue will be delayed. Please send us a change of address as soon as you know it.

The Labor Dispute

by Joy Luckabaugh

When the wicked witch stormed into her stillroom after the final christening party of the season, she found a thick film of dust covering the tables, books, and jars. The resident brownie snored audibly in his corner, not far from a bowl of sour milk. Her apprentice, Dorinda, sat on a low stool, playing cat's-cradle with a bit of string.

The brownie jolted awake at the slamming of the door, and jumped, landing in the bowl of milk. "What is it?" Dorinda asked pertly. "Have you been crashing christening parties again?"

The witch growled and swatted at the brownie with her broom. "What good are brownies who don't clean?" she snarled. He mewled, scurried towards Dorinda, and cowered, curling up in a little ball. The witch threw the broom at Dorinda. "Since the brownie is obviously incompetent, *you* clean the stillroom."

"No," said Dorinda.

"What?"

"I said no," Dorinda repeated. "We're on strike."

"On strike? What kind of crazy idea is that?"

"We took the opportunity while you were on the child-cursing circuit to talk to the good witches' apprentices. They get paid real money in addition to room and board — and their food is edible, too, not like that slop you keep giving us." The brownie whined agreement and curled back up again. "The good witches don't use their apprentices' hair and blood as ingredients in their spells. They teach them to work their own magic."

"You can't do this. We have a contract."

"Our contract is illegal and I want to renegotiate it."

"Over my dead body!" The witch's face flamed with rage. "You signed that contract with your heartsblood at moonlight."

"It's illegal," said Dorinda calmly, "to take blood from your apprentices with no medical oversight." She flicked her wrists to change the pattern strung between her fingers. She had become quite good at it after a season of practice. "The brownie and I have unionized."

"Unionized!" The witch's face became redder than Dorinda thought possible. "I'll unionize you! I'll turn you both into one creature — a girlbrownie. Then your deformed body will be grateful for whatever work it can get!"

"Wheedle, wheedle, weave a beetle," sang Dorinda.

"And stop playing with that thing!" The witch grabbed at the string between Dorinda's hands. Her hands stuck firmly to the string. She tried in vain to remove them, her elbows flailing wildly. Dorinda let go of the string and backed into the corner, nearly tripping over the brownie. The witch brought her foot up to try to free her hands from the sticky string. Her foot stuck fast, and she toppled over, cursing wildly but ineffectually.

Dorinda reached for the brownie's hand and drew him out through the stillroom door into the kitchen, locking the door behind them. "There you go," she said soothingly, placing the brownie on the countertop and wiping the sour milk from his shaking form with a kitchen towel. "The spiderweb spell may be a beginner's spell, but it has its uses. Let's leave the cottage while she's still tied up." She laughed softly, listening to the thumping noises and muffled curses emanating from the stillroom. The authorities should be arriving soon, along with the parents of the children the witch had cursed. She would have liked to stay and see the arrest, but she and the brownie had a job interview with a good witch later that afternoon and didn't want to be late.

❄

Joy Hafter Luckabaugh was born and raised in the suburbs of Washington D.C. She received a B.A. in English literature from Pennsylvania State University in 1992. Her senior thesis won a departmental award; the prize was the first payment she received for writing.

"The Labor Dispute" sprang from her interest in fairy tales and folklore, and the juxtaposition of those themes with modern attitude. It is her first professional sale. She currently works as an editor for a reference publishing company, and lives in Maryland with her husband.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk lives in Coquitlam, B.C., and has been a professional art-

Artwork by Lynne T. Fahnestalk

ist for almost twenty years. She has twice won the Canadian Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement. Her artwork has appeared in numerous publications and is now included on the CD-ROM "Atlantis to the Stars". Lynne can be reached at **lynnetaylorf@earthling.net**.

Artwork by Lynne T. Fahnestalk

INTERVIEW

An Interview With Terry Bisson

by Darrell Schweitzer

Photo by Larry Laszlo

MZBFM: *Let's start with some basics. What's your background? Where are you from, where were you educated?*

Terry Bisson: Born 1942 and raised in western Kentucky. A little old to be a boomer, but definitely a war baby. During the war I lived at the old home place in Calhoun, on the banks of the Green River: coal smoke, tobacco, riverboats and jim crow; afterward I was raised in Owensboro, very suburban, modern, middle class. Thus I know the old lost world, but really belong to the Spielberg/King suburban postwar Thing.

When did you know you wanted to become a writer? And what were you doing before you began to publish in sf and fantasy?

I wanted to be a writer since I read James Ramsey Ullman's **THE SANDS OF KARAKORUM** at age ten. Golden Age sf confirmed it. Especially Bradbury and Simak's **CITY**. In high school in O'boro got into the Beats and even published a poem (at 17!) in *The Village Voice*.

I was lucky enough to run into a real beatnik, Peter Douthit (later Rabbit, hippie founder of Drop City and Libre) who mentored me and a few friends. **TALKING MAN** is dedicated to him.

Couldn't wait to get out of Owensboro and the South in general. Good scores and a rich uncle got me into Grinnell (Iowa), where I lasted two years but made lifelong friends, including actor Peter Coyote and novelist Ken Schiff. Hit the Road a while (LA, NY) then finished at U of Louisville. English and even a creative writing course from David Madden (now at UT and LSU). This was 1963/4; the Sixties had barely started but any fool could smell something in the air.

Won a *Story Magazine* prize for "George" but still didn't realize I was a fantasy/sf writer. (Hadn't touched the stuff in years.) "George" is about a boy born with wings. It's in my collection, **BEARS DISCOVER FIRE**.

Married a NY girl, carried her back to Louisville, had three kids, worked as a social worker and teacher and was miserable. Meanwhile wrote a novel, **DIAMOND JIM**, which I hoped would catapult me to fame and fortune. It got me a great agent, Dorothy Olding (Salinger's **NINE STORIES** is dedicated to her) and an awesome stack of respectful rejection letters.

While I was waiting for **DIAMOND JIM** to make me famous I abandoned my wife and children and moved to NY. The shabbiest act of my life and one I still regret. Got a job at *True Experience* mag, fell into hack writing. Divorced, remarried. **DIAMOND JIM** never found a publisher.

You first came to real prominence with the story "Bears Discover Fire", which delights many people and frustrates some, all for the same reasons. "So bears discover fire," somebody said to me. "So what?" So everything. This story swept lots of awards and is now in the ***Fantasy Hall of Fame*** *as a bona-fide classic. Did this reaction surprise you?*

No writer is really surprised when his work is praised (or even overpraised). It just shows that folks are catching on.

But truly it was a lucky break for me. I think the story deserves its honors, but there are many others just as good that are overlooked or underpraised. Including some by you, and others by me as well. A great title helps, and "Bears" is "warm" which I hear helps; but it comes down to luck in the end. I was very lucky.

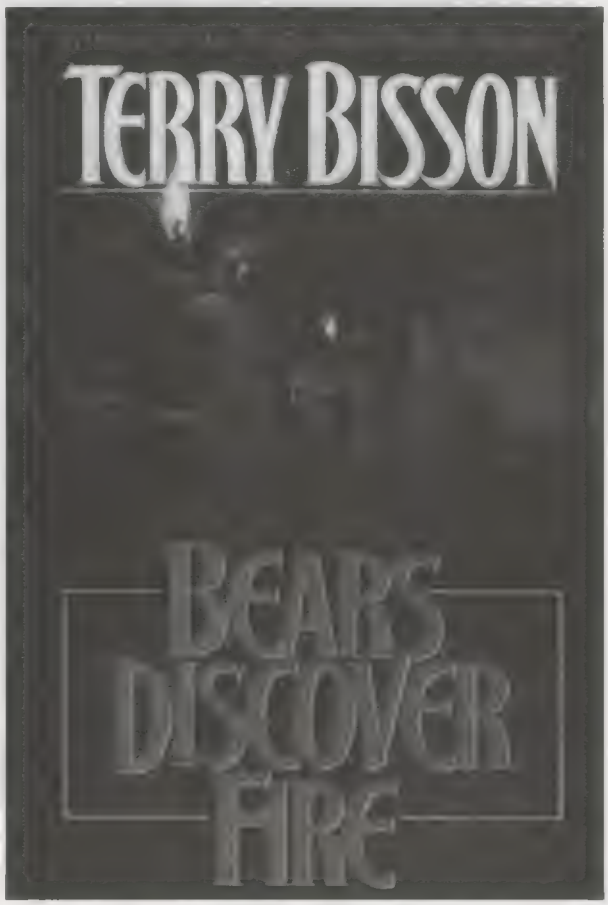
I find the story very typical of your method, which I see as the insertion of some totally deadpan, incongruous element into an otherwise realistic and serious story. The story is about old age and the inevitability of death, and about changing tires, and also, incidentally, about bears discovering fire. How much of this is a conscious choice of technique and how much just comes out that way?

You pretty much nailed my technique. But I didn't make it up. I swiped it from my betters.

Traditional sf is Gee Whiz lit. An amazing problem, an

amazing monster, an amazing solution, etc. The story is about people's efforts to deal with the amazing event. But lately there has been an undercurrent, or countercurrent, in SF in which the Amazing Event is hardly noticed or taken for granted. Kafka started it: Oh sh**, I'm a giant bug; oh well, I'll deal with it. In Stan Robinson's "Glacier" (the ice descends on Boston) the big conflict is what to do with the cat. I didn't invent the form, though I do use it a lot. "England Underway" is another example: it's the exact same story as "Bears" — an Amazing Event resolves a domestic problem. On the other hand I write Gee Whiz sf too (or try). "Necronauts", for example. Or "The Shadow Knows". Or "They're Made out of Meat".

People who *hated* "Bears" because it wasn't sf were right. The bears are there to resonate with the main theme, which is change and the end of the traditional rural South (in which people fixed their own tires). But without the bears there would have been no story at all.



Maybe it's poetic justice that the story is in **THE FANTASY HALL OF FAME**. Technically the story is *not* a fantasy since there is *no* magic, and even a faux-sci explanation (the berries). I haven't written any fantasy since **TALKING MAN**. But am I complaining?

*And what is this about you and cars? **TALKING MAN** is an epic quest fantasy with as much about cars as about magic. Most writers are stereotypically effete & mechanically ineffectual types who wouldn't know an oil pan from an exhaust pipe. You're obviously quite different.*

I'm pretty typical of a Postwar Mid-American small town guy, particularly in the South. I have always loved cars, worked on them as a kid (overhauled my first engine when I was 15). I quit writing altogether in the Seventies and became a pro mechanic — air cooled engines, diesels (a little), transmissions (R&R), tractors and farm machinery, and general engine work. I just have a knack for it and a love for it.

I suppose by taking the fantastic for granted as part of the mundane background, you could claim to be an American Magic Realist and go for the mainstream critical acclaim, if the mainstream critics and academics are still falling for that one. Do you think so?

Don't think it will work for me. I think R. A. Lafferty is our American Marquez; but because of the prejudice against sf he will not be recognized until halfway through the next century, when **OKLA HANNALI** will be seen as the 20th century **MOBY DICK**.

Then again you're not really writing regular sf either. Are the stories of your own that you cite really examples of Gee-Whiz sf or parodies of same? "They're Made Out of Meat", for instance, is a very funny explanation for why the expected sf scenario (visiting aliens) may not happen. It's a deflation of genre conventions.

"Necronauts" is genuine gee whiz (or oh well). So is "First Fire" (uncollected). But I would have to admit my work has more parody than earnestness.

*Let's get back to your fantasy, then. Since when does fantasy have to have formal magic in it? Kafka's "Metamorphosis" is a fantasy, but there is no "magical" explanation for Gregor Samsa's transformation into a giant "vermin". (We always assume cockroach, but Kafka didn't say that. He could as well have been a bedbug or a louse. There is the vestigial science-fiction writer in me, wanting to know the genus and species.) I don't see that fantasy requires someone to cast a spell or read aloud from the **NECRONOMICON** to produce a displacement from reality. A work like Austin Tappan Wright's **ISLANDIA** is fantasy in that it takes place on an imaginary continent. Isn't it likely then that we're getting hung up on stock images of barbarians with swords and Gandalfian wizards? What I particularly like about **TALKING MAN** is that it deliberately plays off those generic expectations in a non-traditional way. It's got quests and wizards, but also cars, drive-ins, and magical parts of the USA that you won't find in a road atlas. Could you discuss the genesis of **TALKING MAN**?*

TALKING MAN came about after I had completed **WYRLDMAKER**, which was a Moorcock-style sword and sorcery. I had delivered, and David Hartwell told me I could write whatever I wanted to. Sort of like the art teacher saying, "OK, you drew the pilgrim and the turkey, now you can draw whatever you want for the rest of the period." **TALKING MAN** was the story that came to mind. Cars always seemed a natural for fantasy to me since they are our best friends and familiars. Talking Man himself was based on a real character I knew and admired called Perry Bill Cardwell, an old-fashioned hillbilly who traded in junk and dug ginseng. The "magic" car was based on my good friend Walter's white 1962 Chrysler which I had always envied. I had been living in NY for about five years and was a little homesick for the sights and scenes of the Upper Mid South (Ky-Tenn) which also figure in "Bears Discover Fire". In many ways the South is like Russia or Ireland: writers want to get away, then write about home.

As far as regional fantasies go, we seem to have more Southern ones than any other kind. Why do you think this is? Obviously something in the culture. Or is it that most of the publishers live in the Northeast, and to them a story set in New York or New Jersey isn't "regional"?

I think the Southern thing is way overworked. It's a regionalism that has entered the popular culture and been canned.

Every actor can do a Southern accent, a New York accent and British accent. Ditto writers.

But is there something about the South which inspires writers?

I often hear writers, particularly Southern writers, talk about the story-telling tradition in the South, and how in their family they always tell stories. To me this is ridiculous. All families tell stories. Hang out with any Italian, Jewish, or Irish family on Long Island or in Brooklyn and you'll hear the same stories with different characters.

The South lives on in literature, though. Why? Because every culture has a nostalgic love affair with its own past. In the US it has been the South and the West (with a little New England thrown in). The South is still (or until recently) the most old-fashioned part of the country; the part with a still living rural tradition. Therefore it's where you go if you want to juxtapose Old and New. Every writer likes to do that. The South is America's Scotland. The myth, the legend, lives on. It's mostly bullsh**; but like all stereotypes it's based on truth.

Something more about ***TALKING MAN****. Quest novels always lead the characters to a confrontation with the Ineffable, be it Sauron, God, or whatever. You did that in* ***TALKING MAN****. The story follows a basic myth pattern for more than just generic reasons. So what is the reason? What do you think is the appeal of this sort of story and this sort of ending?*

What else you gonna do? You go to the North Pole you've got to either kill God, the Devil or Santa. Santa is out for commercial reasons. I killed one of the other two; I forget which one.

After that, you moved into science fiction and have, for the time being, stayed there for the most part. Do you anticipate writing more fantasy? Do you even find this sort of distinction meaningful?

I have indeed strayed away from fantasy. That's because the little that I know of modern science—nanotechnology, quantum physics, relativity etc.— is so much more fantastic than fantasy could ever be. Science gives you a far better bag of tricks to work with than magic of any kind. The kind of "science" I like is of course totally ridiculous: viz, the nanotech in **PIRATES OF THE UNIVERSE**, or the "pocket Universes" in "Dead Man's Curve." My latest *Playboy* story ("I Love Lucy"; due out next year) is about Artificial Intelligence. I like to think it's more artificial than intelligent.

So, does that mean you don't expect to write any more fantasy as such, because you find sf to be the more interesting form? Charles Platt and Gregory Benford will be proud of you ... but what of the possibilities of making fantasy, rather than science fiction, out of the material of science? Other writers have done that, in the commercial fantasy genre (one thinks of the Unknown *school) and also out of it (Borges and Calvino).*

To me, anything you make out of the materials of science is sf, not fantasy. But surely, the lines get blurred. As Tom Disch has said, what could be more *fantastic* than FTL (faster-than-light) or time travel? The distinction, for me, is in the materials and the approach. Sf is more materialistic, more contemporary, without the gestures toward the past that are found in what we call fantasy. In that sense all my work is sf: **TALKING MAN** had to do with cars and Cokes, not horses and wine. I have an affinity with the machinery of the ordinary world.

Could you talk about your involvement with Walter M. Miller's ***ST. LEIBOWITZ AND THE WILD HORSE WOMAN****? What was the extent of your involvement and why were you called in?*

About three years ago I got a call from Miller's agent, Don Congdon. He told me that Miller had been working on a sequel to **A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ** for several years, but was having trouble finishing it. Neither Congdon nor Miller knew me, but I had been recommended to them (by Alice Turner, my editor at *Playboy*) because I was an sf writer, *and* an experienced editor. Both were needed.

I am, of course, one of the millions who read and loved and never forgot **CANTICLE**. I agreed to take a look at Miller's unfinished manuscript, expecting to find a mess. What I found was 592 pages of **ST. LEIBOWITZ AND THE WILD HORSE WOMAN**, beautifully written, polished, revised —and abandoned, all but complete. Plus Miller had left notes and sketches for the final scenes.

Miller was a bit of a recluse. He was over seventy and depressed since his wife had died. He told Congdon that trying to finish the book was "like trying to spit through a screen." I said I definitely wanted the job. I figured I would do the "grunt work" of a draft according to his notes, and he would polish and finish it. Make it sing. I never spoke with Miller directly; he apparently glanced at a couple of my books and told Congdon I would be OK. He said, "Any fool with a sense of humor can finish this book." (Not exactly true, but true enough.)

A deal was struck, but before I wrote anything or even spoke with Miller on the telephone (he lived in Florida) Congdon called and said Miller had shot himself. Miller's manner of death was especially ironic (I hesitate to say tragic, since he had lived his life), since the powerful third book of **CANTICLE** is a polemic against suicide. I was both saddened and disappointed. I was inspired, however, to finish the book and make it as close as possible to what he would have wanted. Only now, it was all up to me.

Before I started writing, I became a Miller scholar. I read and reread the new book and **CANTICLE** until I was an expert on the geography and the complicated names and history. I worked out the map which is in the end papers, drawing on research and my own experience. As luck would have it, I lived for several years in the Sangres ("Suckamints")

of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado where the Abbey of St Leibowitz is located. I share Miller's fascination with the High Plains, a world all grass and sky. Mari Sandoz is one of my favorite writers. (She wrote **OLD JULES** and **CHEYENNE AUTUMN**. She's Nebraska's Tolstoy.)

Any good editor strives to be transparent — to be a facilitator rather than a collaborator. Miller had left only scattered notes and a couple of sketched out scenes, but I incorporated his every word into the finished book. After 592 pages, the characters and the tone of a novel are fully developed. All I had to do was the ending. It was like landing a 747 (*not* a 737!) after the approach to the runway has begun and the wheels and flaps are down. The major decisions have been made — where and when to land. It's still scary, but do-able.

For me it was a great adventure, and I am glad I got to do it with a man I never met, yet grew to love and admire. I feel like I crossed the plains with Francis Parkman, the author of **THE OREGON TRAIL**, and had the good sense to keep my mouth shut and learn a thing or two.

Do you feel that the experience changed you any as a writer? What did you learn from it?

Change me as a writer? No. I'm too old and set in my ways for that. I learned that it is possible to take on another writer's persona and style, at least temporarily. This is usually done only in parody; it was rewarding and fun to do it for real.

So, what is next for you?

I just finished a series of six YA books for Nascar under the name of "T. B. Calhoun." I'm hard at work on a short novel called **SEVEN SUMMITS** about a kid who sets out to climb all the towers and steeples in his town. It's sf.

In non-fiction, I'm doing an article debunking the Y2K "problem" as a myth. It is due 11/15/99 and will be published 02/15/0 = A9 = A5 = A7 = 83 = A2 = B4 = 9F = 8F = 9F = A5 = DD = 8F = 9F = 99 = A9 = 8F = 9F = 8F = A9 = 9F = 8F = A9 = 9F =>> = 8F = DD = 90 = AC = 9A = 9A = 90 = A8 = DD = A5 = DD = 9A = 90 = 99 = DD ...

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Selected Works by Terry Bisson

Books:

NUMBERS DON'T LIE, a Wilson Wu novel, upcoming in 2000
BEARS DISCOVER FIRE, short story collection, Tor paperback
PIRATES OF THE UNIVERSE, 1996, Tor paperback
A *New York Times* "Notable Book" for 1996
TALKING MAN, Arbor House, 1987
ROLLING THUNDER, IN THE GROOVE, RACE READY
Three Nascar "Pole Position" books for kids.
Written by "T. B. Calhoun", HarperCollins, Fall 1998

Novelettes:

"Get Me to the Church on Time" *Asimov's*, May 98
selected by *Locus* for 1998's Top Ten Short Fiction list

Stories:

"Smoother", *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, January 1999
"First Fire", *SF AGE*
"Incident at Oak Ridge", *Fantasy & Science Fiction*
"An Office Romance", *Playboy*
"The Player", *Fantasy & Science Fiction*
"In the Upper Room", *Playboy*
"They're Made out of Meat", *Omni*
"There are no Dead", *Omni*
"The Joe Show", *Playboy*
"10:07:24", *Absolute Magnitude*
"Dead Man's Curve", *Asimov's*
sold but unscheduled:
"I Love Lucy", *Playboy* '99
"macs", *Fantasy & Science Fiction*

Posthumous Collaboration:

SAINT LEIBOWITZ AND THE WILD HORSE WOMAN, Walter M. Miller, Jr. (Bantam hardcover). Mr. Bisson completed the book after Miller's death, see details above.

Articles:

- *The Case of Mumia Abu Jamal*, editorial written for *NY Newsday*
- *A Canticle for Miller: how I met St. Leibowitz & the Wild Horse Woman but not Walter M. Miller, Jr.*
- *Seven Ways to Beat Writer's Block and How I Made Them Work for Me*
- *The Primal Ooze, Clark Dimond, and the Kitchen Sink*
- *The Black Panthers*
- *Hawk Debate Heats Up*
- *Bluegrass on the Banks of the Ohio*
- *SF and the Post-Apollo Blues*
- *Voyage to the Red Continent*

Radio:

Several works by TB are featured on the *Seeing Ear Theater*, the radio drama multiplex at the SciFi Channel Website. They include three adapted comedies, "They're Made out of Meat," "Next," and "The Toxic Donut"; a one-hour drama, "The Flat Edge of the Earth," by TB and SET Producer Brian Smith; and "Orson the Alien," the 60th anniversary commemoration of Welles's 1938 broadcast of "The War of the Worlds" broadcast, scripted by TB, Smith, and actor/writer George Zarr, which was broadcast live from the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City.

Betremia's Revenge

by Joe Murphy

Leaves whispered around her with the hot breeze. Betremia's fingers clutched her shoulders as she huddled in the brush and fought to remain still. Wild oleander and grape filled her nostrils, but it was the distant sour smell of men that knotted her stomach with fear. She could feel sunlight upon her forehead and wondered if she was truly hidden.

"Aaah, she'll have come this way." Keaman's deep voice seemed far too close. "She must have."

"You're daft, man." The higher-pitched words belonged to Shorn, Keaman's merchant friend from Wetground, the town closest to her own hamlet of Marchend. "No one comes this deep into Charwood — let alone a blind hag."

Betremia listened to their heavy footfalls as they tromped through the weeds and grass. Her chest ached, longing for the air she barely allowed. Sweat ran through her hair, burning her useless eyes, dripping from the tip of her nose.

Off to the left, between her and the voices, came a soft dry hiss, almost the sound one might make shucking corn. An animal, perhaps; she'd heard the sound some evenings as she sat before her cottage.

"We should be back in Marchend, searching her cottage instead of wasting time here." Shorn's voice held a pinched nasal quality.

"But she has it hid, I tell you." Keaman's voice was hardly more than a muted growl. "At least so I've been told."

"More gossip is all that is." Shorn's voice grew louder as the two approached. Betremia ducked her head into her shoulders and fought to stop the shakes.

"It was good enough to bring you out here," Keaman said.

"And good enough to bring her neighbors out to stone her." Shorn's heavy footfalls moved steadily towards her. "But that doesn't mean it's the truth."

"I've a wife full of tears and a wee casket in my own house." Keaman's voice grew loud and harsh with anger. "Is that enough truth for you?" Their footfalls halted and Betremia bit her lip to keep from crying out.

"My condolences again for your boy child." Some of the harshness left Shorn's voice. "You've some grieving to do, I'll wager."

"That can wait." Keaman paused and the silence seemed to throb around Betremia. "I'll take revenge over grief any time."

"How did she do it, do you figure?" Shorn asked. The slap of leaves against a quarterstaff followed. Betremia flinched, yet nothing happened.

"A charm of some sort in the boy's clothing. She took in sewing, you know,

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odd bits from the whole village. But she's never liked me, thinks I cheated her out of some corn."

"Did you?"

"How well you know me, old friend." Keaman chuckled softly. His quarter staff rattled the bushes off to her right. "Perhaps, though, I should be getting back to my wife. Parson Reshura intends to call this afternoon and we'll move the boy's body to the church."

"Then what of the treasure?" Shorn asked.

"I'll meet you at the hag's cottage this eve," Keaman said.

"Still be hard to find it. We need more than a rumor." Shorn moved a little farther away. Again came the hiss like shucking corn and both men paused to listen.

"By tonight I'll have more." Keaman's voice shook as he croaked; Betremia heard the dryness in his throat. Something they both shared; the sound's strangeness frightened her as well.

"I'll return to the inn then." Shorn's voice quavered slightly.

"You'll stay here and look a while longer," Keaman said. "At least if you want a share ..."

"But not too long." Shorn's voice hardened. "Even in Wetground we've heard the stories of Charwood. I don't like being here alone."

"Agreed then," Keaman said. His footfalls were full of the rasping brush and the thirsty autumn grass as he lumbered away.

A dry scrabbling moved briefly by her foot. Betremia clenched her fists, her jaw pulsing with pressure. A little farther away Shorn's breathing blended with the breeze. At last, at long last, his footfalls moved away and then disappeared beneath the forest's whisper.

How long she huddled in the brush Betremia didn't know. She was dimly aware of the patch of sun warming her forehead, then moving slow as a snail down her right cheek and jaw.

At least now she understood why gruff hands had pulled her from her bed that morning. The screaming accusations of the people of Marchend had been too shrill, too hard to understand — but not the stones they hurled.

They thought she'd killed little Dimo, but she'd done nothing to the child, only mended the tiny velvet shirt as his mother asked. Yet it was more than that, Betremia realized; what had Keaman said about a treasure? In her home? Perhaps his grief had maddened him.

Hare would help her.

Betremia thought again of the young man with the silver voice. Hare had always helped her. Hare's father was the town miller; but often the man was too deep in his cups to be much of a father. Hare brought her corn to shuck and clothes to mend. He was her eyes and the smooth honeyed texture of his words always made her smile. She hadn't heard his voice at the stoning; no doubt he was off on some errand and would be shocked at what their neighbors had done. Yes, somehow she must get back to Marchend and find Hare.

A strange quiet had layered the forest. The jay and thrush didn't sing so loudly now and a cool dampness chilled the air. Betremia cocked her head and listened; Shorn's footsteps had disappeared. Just as she was about to squirm from her hiding place that dry husking call filtered through the brush — and something just as dry and tattered crawled over her leg.

Betremia bit down on the scream in her throat. For a moment all she could hear was the pounding of her pulse, then her hand cautiously crawled down her side and reached out.

It felt loathsome beyond anything she'd ever imagined touching. Dry shreds of thin fibrous material hung in folds; cold knobs of smoothness grew from between them. One moved as her index finger bumped it. No larger than a berry, she picked it up, felt its tiny legs wriggling against her thumb.

A shudder moved through her as she flicked it into the brush. The thing on

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her lap squirmed, claws scratching at the flax of her dress. It made the cornshuck noise again, wriggled and settled down.

If it means me harm it will harm me, Betremia decided, so I might just as well try to move it off me now. She forced her hands upon it, gently, the way she might have handled some noble's silk. In spite of the folds and knobs a shape formed in her mind.

A long rough tail, the thick though tattered torso about as long as her arm, and sturdy claws, not sharp like a beast of prey, but blunt as if for digging. When her fingers touched the head Betremia's hand drew back of its own. Forcing her fingers down again she tried to feel out the shape of its skull but could not. Each time she touched it the shape seemed to change, yet she could never feel it happening. This was enough, for one of her age, to know the creature harbored some sort of magic.

It hissed softly as her fingers moved, but not the sound of anger. This creature hurt. Those cold knobby things were ticks, she realized, though she'd never come across any quite so big. The shreds must be the poor beast's skin; it had tried to rid itself of the vermin but become injured in the doing. Betremia knew a charm for ticks.

She blew upon her fingertips three times and whispered, "Blood steals blood. Shovel meets pick. Begone. Begone. Begone now, tick." Her fingers closed on the first they came to, feeling along the pulpy body to where its tiny head lay buried in flesh. Her fingernails, short and torn, couldn't grasp it but she repeated the charm and pushed them against the tick's head. It came loose and began to crawl up her thumb, leaving a cold trail of wetness.

Betremia flicked it away and began on the next. A score or more covered the poor creature's ragged back and by the time she finished its skin had grown slick and the tattered folds of flesh soft and mushy. The scent of blood filled her nose, old blood, ripe and noxious in its congealing.

Her fingers were perhaps the best thing about Betremia. They could tell a knot stitch from a cross one; they could count the kernels of a baby corn right through the husk. Now they told Betremia which of the fleshy folds was dead and could be pulled away and which might be pressed back to help seal the wounds. The creature squirmed; its front claws began to contentedly grip and release her leg.

A lizard of some sort, she decided as one hand stroked its sides to distract it while the other finished with its back. Betremia pressed her palm down flat to seal the wounded flesh. The creature shivered and something in that shiver moved up into her hand, trembled through her arm, quivered through her shoulders and neck and then into her head. The feeling focused right behind her eyes; a fuzziness appeared.

Betremia gasped as the forest around her took form. For the first time in her life she beheld the delicacy of a leaf trembling in the breeze. Colors whose names she could only guess at, the shine of the setting sun upon wild rose, the shadowed glow of a mushroom nestled in tree roots, the darting of a jay as it swooped low, all these things held her still as stone.

How bitter the scented darkness that stole it all away once more. Only when the moonlight rippled through the brush did she manage to look down, yet her vision remained as it was until she shifted the creature upon her lap. Betremia's hands rose to her face and her sight vanished once again.

"What have you given back to me, little one? Have I seen the world through your eyes?" Yet when she dared touch the beast and lift it from her lap, the tremor moved through her once more with the cold wetness of its blood and she gazed upon the forest bathed in a pale harvest moon.

The creature nuzzled against her and she lifted it gently, cradling it as she might a child, bringing the head up until she gazed upon a pallid oblong mass, threaded with wrinkles. Two blobs peered sightlessly beneath the tattered mats of strings. Betremia looked upon her own face yet held the sob within.

No wonder they'd stoned her. Surely something so hideous would frighten a child to death. But that wasn't what Keaman had accused her of. She'd left no charm in the babe's clothes, in fact knew nothing of such terrible magic. She was just an old woman and knew only those things any old woman might know, a few household charms.

Perhaps this was why the forest itself showed her mercy, as she'd been merciful to this creature. By holding it close she could see, could trace her way back to Marchend and perhaps even find Hare. She might even see his smile that she'd only heard through his wonderful voice all these years. Betremia rose carefully, mindful of the brush that clawed them both. A wave of dizziness swept through her as she stood; the ground seemed so far away, even though she felt it beneath her toes as she always had. Stepping forward she

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found the path.

"So here's your hiding place." Shorn's voice was an ugly screech. A hand grasped her shoulder and spun her round. "Now you'll speak of the treasure before ..." The grip on her shoulder tightened painfully, and then became terribly still. Betremia fought for breath and jerked from his hand. Cloth tore with a rasping sound. Her view from the lizard's eyes shifted to a motionless figure the color of moonlight. Shorn stood before her, frozen, his thrusting chin and beakish nose so sharp they might have been chiseled from stone.

"For stone they are," Betremia breathed and knew then the creature in her arms was a basilisk. Even in Charwood such things must be rare, but not impossible. It wriggled against her chest, front claws kneading the skin where her dress had torn.

"Blessed be Charwood Forest," Betremia said to the statue. "For it has given me not only sight and a chance to find my friend Hare. It's also brought me my revenge." She started for the village, her back aching, arms bruised and sore from the stones of her neighbors. Stone had been their weapon but now it was hers — and Keaman would cheat no one else and grieve no more.

The moon moved across the stars and vanished behind the craggy blackness of the distant Tingham Peaks. Hare had told her enchanting stories of the mountains, though like her, he'd never been there. The forest hoarded what was left of the meager light but to Betremia it was a feast beyond price. The glinting fungus upon a tree, the dashing embers of tiny fireflies, so much to see in the rippling shadows upon the trees.

Betremia stroked the basilisk's head, her other hand sealed against the beast's back by its blood. Occasionally the creature would yawn and stretch; once it made the corn-shuck noise but otherwise seemed quite content, huddling against her to escape the night's chill.

She stood listening to the nightwing's call, staring out between two great spreading trees at Marchend. Betremia scowled; certainly she was ugly and old; she'd known that for ages yet nothing quite brought the message home as that first glimpse of her face. She'd once heard Marchend described as a small, sorry place, yet the words meant little until she gazed at the broken-down lean-tos and shacks clustered around a few larger though just as drab cottages. Perhaps her nose had grown used to Charwood; from the forest the village stank of offal and garbage.

She wandered the muddy ruts between dwellings for a while until she found one smaller than the rest, the walls crumbling and the roof only half thatched. This was her home; Keaman's lay on the far side of the village. She was about to pass by when she saw the thinnest gleam of light peeping through the cracks of her door. Betremia came close, pressed her ear to the door and listened. She lifted the basilisk until its eyes blinked with the brightness and it squirmed in her arms.

"Do you think he found her?" The voice was Keaman's. His oval face was framed with blond hair. His eyes glinted and gazed at the floor. Another stood before him; this short bent-backed man only shrugged from a waist-deep hole. "I think he must have, but then what could be keeping him? Shorn could have snapped her neck. He's a strong one."

The other only grunted and began to dig once more. Betremia's vision twisted as the basilisk squirmed again. She pulled the tattered remains of her dress around them both and pressed the creature to the crack once more.

"We'll split his share, I suppose." Keaman squatted down by the hole and watched the dirt pile grow higher. "That is, assuming you find anything."

"There!" The other cried, holding up a sliver of light. "Silver, as I told you. There must be more buried here. I'm sure of it."

Betremia squeezed her blind eyes shut and clutched the basilisk to her. Tears threaded the wrinkles beneath her eyes, for the man's voice held all the silver she'd ever treasured. Yet the basilisk stared on, and when the man straightened she looked upon the face of her friend Hare.

He was not so pleasing as his voice; dark splotches of pimples covered his cheeks; the thatch of hair was dirty and uncombed. But it was the ugly lines around his mouth, the wicked grin as he held his prize to the lantern light, that sickened her.

"Move over and I'll help you dig." Keaman stretched his legs into the hole.

"So long as you don't expect a greater share." Hare's voice deepened into a growl, the silver gone from his voice. "I spent too long gaining the old hag's trust to give up any of mine."

The basilisk blinked then, and Betremia found she was holding her breath. She lifted the creature up and nuzzled it, careful not to see her own face. The coarse grind of shovels and ragged breathing came from the cottage. As tears dripped from her chin to wet the back of her hand where it pressed against the basilisk, she smiled. Only the thinnest slabs of wood sepa-

Artwork by George Barr

rated her from revenge.

Her free hand left the basilisk and touched the rough iron latch. Then she shook her head and stopped. The basilisk's gaze swung around, showing her the lopsided hovels and crumbling cottages. What had she gained from a lifetime here? Nothing, she realized, not even something precious enough to be called a friend, and neither grief nor revenge would change that. Now, however, the dark sameness to those dreary days lay in her past. The basilisk had given her so much more. As long as she held and cared for the beast, she could see. How much more beautiful was Charwood Forest.

One last glimpse she took of the two fools. The dirty collar of Hare's shirt gleamed where he had pinned his treasure. It was only a needle after all, which of course she buried each night to keep it sharp. Any aging seamstress might do the same; the charm was a simple and common one — but these were men after all who knew nothing of sewing.

Betremia was about to chuckle when a shaft of pure gold brought dawn's first light to the forest. Her breath caught in her throat and she hugged her new companion as the first slight promise of warmth touched their skin. Distant dry calls, like so much corn being shucked, beckoned from deep beneath the spreading boughs. Slowly Betremia smiled, then carried her friend back into the brightening woods, back to their home.

❄

Joe Murphy writes: "I live with my wife, Veleta, our three dogs, and our two cats in Fairbanks, Alaska. I've been writing seriously now for six years ... I recently realized that I would rather be an unsuccessful writer than a successful anything else. Fantasy of all kinds, as well as science fiction and horror, has always been a big part of my life." He's made numerous professional sales, although this is his first to *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*. He adds, "Twelve of my previously published stories will soon appear on the internet through Alexandria Digital Literature (www.alexlit.com)."

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960 and has been one of *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine*'s favorite artists since our first issue, often winning the Cauldron award for his illustrations. He has won a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been nominated in the Professional Artist category as well. He lives in northern California.

Beauty and the Beast

The 1999 Catalog comes out this spring.

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http://www.sf3.org/wiscon

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine
BACK ISSUE DESCRIPTIONS

___#3 (Winter 1989)
The Adinkra Cloth (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge. *A Glassmaker's Courage* - M. Coleman Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr.
Cover art by Kelly and Laura Freas.
Guest editorial by Julian May.

___#14 (Fall 1991)
Black Ribbon - Dawn Albright. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *The Wuzzles* - M.Z. Bradley. *Stand By Me* - Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck.
Cover art by Gail Butler.
Interview with Teresa Edgerton.

___#16 (Spring-Summer 1992)
Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth - Jennifer Roberson. *Dragonfire* - John Buentello. *The Death of Ranat's Pass* - Katherine Blake.
Cover by Alan Gutierrez.
Interview with Lois McMaster Bujold.

___#18 (Winter 1992)
Arakney's Web - Jo Clayton. *The Black Tower* - Laura J. Underwood. *The Witch's Child* - Patricia Duffy Novak. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar.
Cover by Nick Jainschigg.
"Celtic Folk Music Sources" by Tom Whitmore.

___#20 (Summer 1993)
Cannibal Sorcerer - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole. *An Affair of Wizards* - Jon C. Crusoe. *Night Stand* - Frank Tuttle. *Trap-Tricker* - Julia S. Mandala.
Cover art by Ron Walotsky.

___#22 (Winter 1993)
Mad Evren's Dreams - Phyllis Ann Karr. *Ladyslipper* - Lawrence Schimel. *The Demon's Lamentation* - Laura J. Underwood. *The Gift* - Marilyn Brahen.
Cover by Alicia Austin.
Interview with Elizabeth Moon.

___#23 (Spring 1994)
Killer Byte by Mercedes Lackey. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *My Girl* - Mike Resnick. *Never Doubt a Sorcerer* - John Buentello.
Cover art by Vincent Di Fate.
Peter Beagle interview.

___#24 (Summer 1994)
Ice Princess - Elisabeth Waters. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. *The Kestrel's Tears* - Kimberly Egan. *The Gargoyle's Burden* - L.S. Silverthorne.
Cover art by David Cherry.
Katherine Kurtz interview.

___#25 (Fall 1994)
The Masterpainter - Diana L. Paxson. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer. *The Beginning of Tears* - Steven Piziks. *Firecrackers* - Tim Miller.
Cover by Jill Bauman.
Interview with Ray Nelson.

___#26 (Winter 1994) – *Dinner Music* - Jo Clayton. *Fool's Fire* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *The Mage Who Dreamed of Gryphons* - Cynthia McQuillin. *The Wizard and the Lizard* - Carl Thelen.
Cover by Nick Jainschigg.
Interview with Jennifer Roberson.

___#27 (Spring 1995)
Pot of Dreams - C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher. *A Little Night Music* - Dorothy J. Heydt. *The Chocolate Genie* - Ginger Strivelli. *Spaces* - Edwina Mayer.
Cover by David A. Cherry.
Interview with Gahan Wilson.

___#28 (Summer 1995)
The Harder They Fall - Tanya Huff. *The Long Divorce of Steel* - eluki bes shahar. *Get With Child a Mandrake Root* - K. Kimberly Prosser and Lisa Swope.
Cover by Bob Eggleton. Interview with Diana Paxson and Adrienne Martine-Barnes.

___#29 (Fall 1995)
Bloodsong - Jo Clayton. *Humphrey's Dilemma* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Caitlin's Magic* - Jackie Shank. *The Cats of Time* - William A. Sell.
Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg.
Interview with Tanya Huff.

___#30 (Winter 1996)
A Prince Among Frogs - Elisabeth Waters. *The Counterfeit Maiden* - Richard Purtill. *Fatherhood* - Steven Piziks. *La Donna Triste* - Patricia Russo.
Cover by Jonathan Hunt.
Interview with Lisa Goldstein.

___#31 (Spring 1996)
The Weeping Loon - RobinWayne Bailey. *Dragon-in-Law* - Connie Hirsch. *Neko's Dance* - Carol Leever. *Eat at Ro's* - Julia S. Mandala.
Cover by James Balkovek.
Interview with Poul Anderson.

___#32 (Summer 1996)
Fox Maid's Travail - Jo Clayton. *The Little Pink Worm* - Dorothy Heydt. *Raven* - Raul Reyes. *Eighty Shen* - Carrie Martin. *New Leaves* - Syne Mitchell.
Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg.
Interview with Charles de Lint.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine
BACK ISSUE DESCRIPTIONS

___#33 (Fall 1996)
A Sphinx in the Mind - Karen Anderson. *United Powers* - Kathleen Massie-Ferch. *A Painterly Effect* - Ardath Mayhar. *The Serpent Within* - Terry McGarry.
Cover by Margaret Organ-Kean.
Interview with Esther Friesner.

___#34 (Winter 1997)
Thin Man - Steven Piziks. *The Bone's Captive Bride* - Jo Clayton. *The Test* - Max Wright. *Thimbleful of Magic* - Carrie Martin. *Little Things* - Sherry Ramsey.
Cover by George Barr.
Interview with Ellen Kushner.

___#35 (Spring 1997)
Maiden Phoenix - India Edghill. *The Rose, the Rich Man, and Mother Berchte* - Steven Piziks. *The Oak King's Wrath* - Laura J. Underwood.
Cover Vincent Di Fate.
Interview with Susan Shwartz.

___#36 (Summer 1997)
The Knife that Makes Men - Mary Aldridge. *Kvetchula* - Darrell Schweitzer. *A Certain Talent* - Dorothy J. Heydt. *North to Northwander* by Marion Z. Bradley.
Cover by Alicia Austin and George Barr.
Interview with Vincent Di Fate.

___#37 (Fall 1997)
Grey - Mercedes Lackey. *Winterkill* - Colin Dunn. *Exterminator* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Dark Queen* - Kathryn J. Brown. *Quickly Wise*-Devon Monk.
Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg.
Interview with Octavia E. Butler.

___#38 (Winter 1998)
Bisclavret - India Edghill. *A Voice in the Night* - Katherine Blake. *Whistle the Wind* - Cynthia McQuillin. *A Scent of Magic* - John Buentello.
Cover by Margaret Davis.
Interview with Lawrence Watt-Evans.

___#39 (Spring 1998)
Escape Artists - Susan Shwartz. *The Valley of Stones* - Patricia Duffy Novak. *The House in the Hollow* - Helen Kenyon. *Some Enchanted Evening* - Y. Coats.
Cover by David Cherry.
Interview with Connie Willis.

___#40 (Summer 1998)
Ivy - Esther Friesner. *Running to Camelot* - Darrell Schweitzer. *The Piper's Tale* - Laura Underwood. *Giorsal* - Patricia Russo. *Fairy Tale* - J. Watts
Cover by Mark Harrison.
Interview with Robert Holdstock.

___#41 (Fall 1998)
Tiger, Tiger - Carol Leever. *Gryphon Rider* - Cherith Baldry. *Three Nights Penance 'til Lakkas Day* - Janna Silverstein. *Steelwing* - Connie Wilkins.
Cover by Carl Lundgren.
Interview with Nancy Springer.

___#42 (Winter 1999)
Hellhound - Deborah Wheeler. *A Winter's Tale* - Laura Underwood. *Absinthe Eyes* - Charlene Brusso. *Grey Wolf's Tale* - Richard Purtill.
Cover by Margaret Organ-Kean.
Inter- view with eluki bes shahar.

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MZB TALKS TO WRITERS:

Sex and Bad Language

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

I occasionally get letters from writers whose stories I have rejected as having "too much sex" or "unsuitable language" asking me exactly what it is that I consider unsuitable. Or, as my secretary said indignantly when I commented on one of her stories — "What do you mean 'too much sex'? It's got *one* kiss in it!" (And in fairness to Lisa, that story was for another market, she wasn't submitting it to the magazine.)

Actually "too much sex" often overlaps "too romantic" — I use both of them to refer to stories where the emphasis is on the relationship between the characters (whether physical or emotional), rather than on the action and adventure I look for in the stories I buy. I want something to *happen* — and the highlight of the story had better not be a kiss! It's not that I object to characters having relationships; obviously in a good story the characters do relate to one another, but I also want the story to have a plot.

One of the tests I use for a story is to read it, set it aside, then pick it up again the next morning and see if I remember it. If I can't remember the plot and/or point of a story I read yesterday, I don't buy it. I'm looking for something that I not only remember but also that I *want* to remember. (I will remember forever a story someone sent in for **SWORD & SORCERESS** fifteen years ago about an order of sadistic lesbian priestesses and their telepathic purple rhinoceroses, but I never considered buying it for a minute. Ditto the story that began "She wore the typical Amazon's costume of three strips of soft white leather ..." She was on horseback, and my staff still laugh about that one, with references to sunburn, heat stroke, chafed thighs, horsehair in places you don't want to think about ... Sorry, I'm getting sidetracked here.)

With regard to language, I have been known to reject stories that used "hell" or "damn" or even "bloody" — which is more of a swearword in England than it is here. As for the more graphic four-letter words, don't even try them. Maybe I'm turning into a prude in my old age — no, actually I'm not — I've never cared for profanity. And my uncle Fred, an Episcopal priest, said that it was silly to consign something to eternal perdition when what I really meant was "how very tiresome" (as I recall, it was a run in my stocking, so I must admit he had a point). Minor annoyances do not call for hellfire.

As a writer I believe in the importance of words, and I believe that it is not only possible but highly desirable to tell a story using words that will make it come alive and take up residence in the head of the reader. But I want that story to be one that my readers want to have living with them. Anyone can write a story which is offensive, but writing about a subject which may offend people in a way which will not offend them takes skill and craft. And that's what I want to encourage in "my" writers.

❄

ARTISTS TALK BACK:

The Do's and Don'ts of Art Submissions

by Margaret Davis

The number of art submissions we receive at *Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine* in every way rivals the number of manuscripts, so much so that we have to employ an art "first reader" (yours truly). Here are a few tips to help you get past the first reader and into the coveted "Assignments Pending" folder.

First off, how can one possibly have an idea of the sort of art we publish without ever having looked at a copy of an issue? Buy, borrow, or check out from the library a few back issues and familiarize yourself with our preferred art styles. As you will see, we only use full-color art on the cover; all interior art is black and white. How does one get to be on the cover of our magazine? There are two ways: 1. You're a famous, established artist who has deigned to let us use one of your glorious illustrations. 2. You've been selling black and white illustrations to us for some time and we're familiar with your work.

Once you have familiarized yourself with our magazine and the kind of art we publish, you will immediately become aware of the sorts of styles we do not publish. We do not buy horror, goth, or dark fantasy art (oozing skulls, dying maidens, evil clowns, and the like). We do not buy comic book or children's art styles. We do not buy nearly or completely bare-breasted maidens.

We do not buy muscled adventurers *à la* Boris Vallejo (although if Mr. Vallejo deigned to appear on our cover, we probably wouldn't turn him down. See number 1. above). We publish high fantasy stories and we purchase high fantasy art to accompany them. The greatest percentage of rejection letters I write are of the "sorry, wrong style" sort.

It pains me, but with a certain regularity I have to write rejection letters of the "sorry, not professional" sort. We receive submissions ranging from rank amateurs out of high school all the way up to people working for major ad corporations who've been pro for twenty years. Who do you think we're going to buy from? Make absolutely sure that each one of the art samples you submit is up to professional standards. We look for consistency of skill level — we have to be certain that you can reproduce art of the caliber submitted upon demand. Run your samples past your old art teacher first, if necessary. Ask your local established pro artist friend. Many of you need another six months' to several years' more work before attempting to enter the professional art world.

The final category into which most rejection letters fall is "sorry, like too many others". We're looking for original art here. We have dozens of artists on file who do pen and ink, cross-hatching, Celtic borders, etc. People who are really good in graphite pencil styles are rare [though pencil work can be difficult to reproduce well -- REH], as are fine etchers or woodblock printers. We publish calligraphy. Try to determine what makes your style unique and focus on that.

OK, you've got your art samples together. What do you send, and how do you send it? **Do not send your original art.** Our files simply aren't big enough to keep everyone's masterworks in storage, in the archival manner which they deserve. Send a few photocopies, preferably black and white. Do not send slides unless requested. A short bio of your previous published work is useful. If you would like your samples returned, include a SASE with adequate postage. If you would like a critique of your work, include a note to that effect. If you don't like the critique you receive, do not write a nasty letter back to the Assistant Art Editor (it's happened); this will adversely affect your chances of being hired. If you get a request for further samples, respond.

When will I hear back about my submission, you may ask? Your package is reviewed (by me) on the day we receive it. If it's truly wonderful, it goes straight to the Art Editor, Rachel Holmen, who will make a final decision at that time. If you're good, but not overwhelmingly amazing, your work will be placed in a file to be reviewed at the Art Editor's leisure. If your work is not suitable, for whatever reason, you'll receive a letter to that effect within a couple of weeks. If you would like immediate notification that your package was received, include a stamped, self-addressed postcard that we can quickly and easily fill out and mail back to you. You may also call me and follow up to determine the status of your submission. I have immense respect for people who care enough to follow up; it has been known to happen that some of them get bumped up immediately to Rachel's desk.

OK, you've submitted, you've followed up, you got an assignment. What do you do? Whatever you do, don't panic! Simply deliver the assigned illustrations on time, in a style and skill level commensurate with the samples you submitted. You will be informed as to the subject matter, size, and proportions required — be sure to follow these guidelines exactly. If you have questions about details of the assignment, please ask. If something comes up and you won't be able to finish an assignment on time, let us know quickly; we may be able to grant an extension of time, or we will reassign the story to a different artist, but we won't think you're an unprofessional jerk, which **is** what we'll think if you appear to be ignoring or forgetting the assignment.

We're always looking for skilled artists, so send us your samples, and good luck! ❄

THE ART DIRECTOR SPEAKS:

Pitfalls of Art Direction

by Rachel E. Holmen

Actually, Margaret, I don't think I'd publish a Boris on the cover even if we could afford his work. Though I'd have to see the painting in question. But I am working on getting rights to some work by Leo and Diane Dillon, whose style seems very much in line with our fantasy theme.

I used to think that the most important qualification for an art director was consistent taste. Now I think it's the ability to worry incessantly.

In the eight years I've done this job, I keep thinking I've seen every possible difficulty regarding artwork assignments. But I always get to learn something new. Packages get lost; packages get sent via UPS or FedEx to our Post Office Box and disappear into black holes; packages are given addresses that omit a digit from our street address (and only one woman at the whole FedEx plant here is smart enough to figure this out and get these packages to us); packages are sent to the correct street address but to a different city; the stat people have gone out of business since the last issue; a story must be pulled at the last minute (after artwork has been turned in and paid for) because I discovered it previously printed elsewhere; the artist turns in work the wrong size; the artist has turned over the assignment to a student for completion; the artist found the deadline too tight and couldn't complete the work in time; the artist, knowing there was plenty of time before the deadline, forgot the assignment entirely; the artist, who has sent you samples for two

years and knows your payment rates, has decided the assignment you've given them won't pay enough; the artist has had their phone disconnected; the artist has miscalculated the enlarged proportions of the assignment and sent in a "full-height" illo that's three inches too short; the artist has prepared work for a two-column format but stories are always done in three-column layouts; the artist has gotten a better assignment and decided to turn in only one of three expected illos; Artist #1's bill is mislaid and sent by mistake to Artist #2; the artist has forgetten entirely to send a bill — or has sent one without providing a social security number, so we can't pay them; the artist has sealed the package so thoroughly that it took me half an hour to open it; the artist posted the file on a website but emailed me an incorrect or incomplete filename, in a password-protected directory; the artwork requires a word to be included in the picture, but it's spelled wrong; the artist has sent four pieces, all in the same style, but one scans well and the other three practically disappear on the screen; the artist has sent pencil work and the scanner doesn't give a good reproduction; the artwork is surrounded by lines which are at eighty-nine-degree angles to each other, which look odd...but artists are creative people, and so they are continually inventing new difficulties. Not that they mean to. Not that the artists I work with aren't some of the nicest people on the planet. But not all of them are good at spelling, or at business, or with computers.

Some of the rules: before you start an assignment, doublecheck the sizes. When done, never mail your only copy; save a scan or a photocopy. Be sure you are mailing to the correct address. If in doubt about any of these points, call.

I worry that "fine artists" sneer at "mere illustrators", and that illustration work may derail a promising professional career. I worry that the artists might forget to calculate and pay estimated taxes (and IRS penalties are not amusing). I worry that I am leading the artists down a path toward bankruptcy, since very few people can live on an income provided by black-and-white artwork alone.

There are problems we have never had, though: so far, we have never damaged a piece of artwork while it was in our hands, dripped water or ink on it, or torn it; and I don't think anything has ever been permanently lost. I have never sliced up a piece of artwork while wrestling to get a package open. Nobody has ever sent in a color piece that didn't reproduce well in black and white. Only once have we been sent artwork which someone else spotted as an obvious plagiarism of another work. (Unfortunately, we did publish the piece in question; it was before my time but I could have made the same mistake.) But I worry, I always worry. ❄

Shipping checklist for artwork assignments

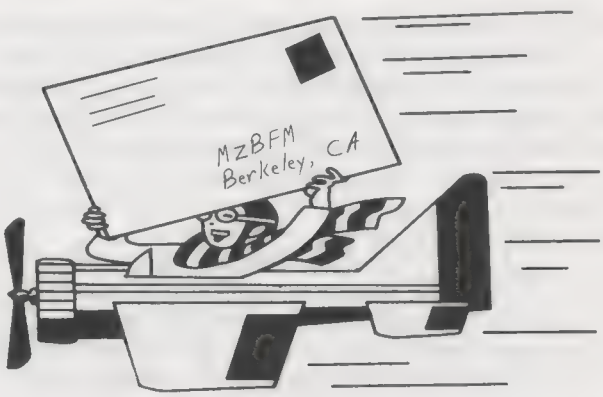
Sketches

- Sketches are most commonly sent by fax; a few come via FedEx or email, or are posted to a website for download. If you do not receive a response from the MZBFM art director within a half day, please phone. (This applies only to sketches sent in for an actual assignment. Do not fax unsolicited artwork to anyone; you'll just irritate the recipient.)
- If you decide to do the assignment at a different size than the final reproduction, doublecheck your proportions. One good way is to measure and calculate once using inches, then do it all over again using centimeters.
- If you intend to send a rectangle, don't draw a trapezoid.

Final Artwork

- Send copies, not originals: if you are sending artwork to be reproduced as a "line cut", it's okay (maybe even a good idea, considering the mails) to send 2 full-size stats of each original, and keep the originals in your possession. If the art is to be halftoned, send the originals carefully packed, and we will return them to you when the issue is back from the printer. The maximum size we can scan is 8-1/2" x 11". Larger pieces will be halftoned at the printshop.
- If you created the art on computer, or have your own scanner, see the sidebar on "Computer Notes".
- Each piece should include your name & address, and the story title that matches the art. Number the pieces sequentially or refer to the layout you were sent with the assignment — anything to let us know which illustration is which. The art director probably last read the story months ago, so refresh her memory.
- Tell us the exact wording of your artist's credit. Lee E. Jones? L.E. Jones? Lee Jones? Lee and Terry Jones? LEJ Studios?
- Send an invoice with your payment amount. On the invoice, itemize your shipping cost and any other reimbursable expenses (cost for stats, etc.). Be sure the invoice includes your name, address, and social security number.
- Include a short bio, resume, or professional bio. The bio should be in the third person. Here's an example: "Lee Jones began drawing unicorns at the age of two and won the best artist Hugo in 1997. Lee teaches illustration and book design at a major university, loves jazz, and has two cats and a large collection of Dutch masters. Julia Child and Vincent Van Gogh were Lee's students one summer at the Chicago Art Institute."

— Rachel E. Holmen, Publisher and Art Director



• When you save the computer-created image or the scan, use old-style DOS-type filenames: 8 characters, a dot, and a 3-letter extension. For instance, don't name something DRAGONWAYPAGE17.TIFF. Call it DRAGON17.TIF instead.

• If you send electronic sketches, use a low resolution such as 75 or 100 dots per inch so that the file sizes are reasonable. (For final artwork, use a much higher resolution; see below.)

• Save all image files in either TIF or JPEG format (we can also read GIF and BMP but don't try anything else). In email, tell the art director which of these file formats you have used and whether you are including the files with the email (as an attachment) or if you have posted the files on a website. If you send a disk, put the file format information on the disk label. Indicate whether it's a PC or Mac disk.

• If the files are sent via email, tell the art director which encoding format your software uses: MIME is probably best; we can also read BinHex. If you post the files on a website, there is no need to use MIME or BinHex, so please don't.

• If you post artwork on a website for download, be sure that you have provided the full correct filename(s) and the correct website URL. No art director is telepathic enough to know when you have changed a filename or forgotten an extension. Be sure that you haven't password protected the file or made it otherwise inaccessible to an outsider.

• If you are sending TIF files, you will want to select "LZW compression" when you save the files. This makes them smaller without any loss of detail, and is part of the process you go through when saving the file on the computer.

• Send the smallest files you can. There are several programs available as shareware or as lowcost commercial software, to compress data and combine groups of files into a single file for transmission. The receiver can then uncompress and separate the files, and see them just the way you originally prepared them. The most common PC format for this is called ZIP; programs that perform this are named PKZIP (use PKUNZIP to unpack these files) and WinZip (packs and unpacks, both), to suggest a few. For Mac users, there is ZipIt (which creates files that a PC user can unzip) and Stuffit (only usable by other Mac users).

• For final artwork, scan the illustrations at a minimum of 600 dpi.

• If you **can** scan artwork or prepare it on the computer at 2400 dpi, that's our preference since it preserves even fine detail. But only the smallest files at 2400 dpi can be sent via email or posted on the web. The alternative is to store them on a 100-MB Zip disk (or burn them onto a CD if you have a writable CD drive) and FedEx them to us.

• Check our webpage **http://www.mzbfm.com/webwise.htm** for downloadable copies of PKZIP and PKUNZIP, ZipIt, and further tips about using computers for artwork, including an explanation of how to post a file on a website using FTP ("file transfer protocol") software. ❄

Halftone or Line Art

Artwork must be reproduced in some way, to be printed in a magazine or book, or made into a poster.

If the original artwork consists of a pattern of solid darks against contrasting light spaces, it will probably be reproduced as "line art". Examples are: pen and ink, conte crayon on textured paper such as coquille board, woodcuts, scratchboard.

If the artwork is created in a pattern of continuous tone, such as an oil painting, watercolor, or photograph, that continuous tone must be artificially broken up into a pattern of dots called a halftone. This is actually a photographic process involving the use of a white screen set between the illustration and the camera.

Halftones are made in different densities, from very coarse (for example, a 50-line screen) to very fine (I've heard of 600-line screens). Part of why we selected the printshop that we use, was that its staff routinely used a 150-line screen, which produces a high-quality image for reproduction on the kind of uncoated paper that we use for Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine. If we used the kind of paper you see in a glossy magazine such as TIME or SUNSET, that paper is actually coated with a layer of ultra-fine particles of white clay, so it's called "clay-coated paper" or just "coated stock"; that kind of paper requires an even finer screen for its best photographs.

Computer scanners use (I am guessing a bit here) an array of tiny light-sensing gizmos, arranged on a bar which travels across the surface of the artworkat an even rate of speed. Three hundred (or six hundred, or whatever) times a second, each gizmo records whether the image in front of it, just for the tiny circle of artwork it "sees", is dark, light, or a specific color. The information is very similar to the halftone screen, but usually at a finer resolution.

Our scanner only actually "sees" at 600 dots per inch, but the computer software with it can make intelligent guesses about what the artwork would look like if it could see at 2400 dpi. This process is called interpolation, and while it's pretty good, it's still a guess. That's why a scanner with a higher hardware resolution creates a more accurate scanned image than one with a lower resolution. ❄

"Computer Notes" and "Halftone or Line Art" written by Rachel E. Holmen, Publisher and Art Director

Pocket Full of Wool

by M. Ruth O'Neill

The well in the deep woods has always been linked to wishes granted and wishes denied. Mark and Anna swore by the pledge they had made to each other after dropping a golden coin into the well's still waters. They've stayed married 25 years, and they toast the well's magic often. But when I headed into the woods that morning, I bore a less romantic burden.

I am not superstitious by nature. I've rarely heeded people who believed in wishes, or those who swore by prayer. Before that morning, I would have committed myself to Bedlam before relying on either one. Unfortunately, I was out of options, and nearly out of time.

Five days before my journey, I was sitting in front of my cottage on Lord Oldine's estate, spinning wool from my three sheep into yarn, and enjoying the mid-summer sun. I hoped to finish my spinning by nightfall. I would have a week to knit the shawls I planned to sell in Sligo to the English and American ladies. (They shopped there when they took a holiday in Ireland's quaint west.) Plenty of time, or so I thought. But then the Wee Man appeared before me, quick as a rabbit. I thought at first he was the bailiff's son, come to threaten me over the rent again, but his red beard and wizened face established his origin quick enough. He was the first leprechaun I'd ever met, and I was stone sober when it happened.

"What are you doing, Missus?" the leprechaun asked me while making a sweeping, old-fashioned bow.

"Spinning," I said, and said no more. It does not pay to volunteer information to strangers.

"What will you make with the yarn when you've finished?" he asked.

"Shawls," I replied.

The leprechaun clasped his hands behind him, and paced back and forth before me. I ignored him the best I could, but he proved to be a powerful distraction. Finally, I dropped the spindle in my lap and glared at him.

"If you want something, you should ask," I said finally. "Then I could decide whether I should give it to you, if it is mine to give."

"I am hungry, Missus, in truth," he said. "Have you a bit of bread and meat to spare?"

"So begging it is," I said crossly. "You see this tiny place. What makes you think that I have any meat at all, let alone bread to spare for the likes of you?" It was not my finest hour.

"Is that not bacon I smell, wafting over here from your kitchen door?" he asked.

"In fact it is," I admitted. "But only the odor. I had but two thin rashers, and ate them both this morning."

"And did you have biscuits with those rashers, Missus, and may you not spare a few of those to a hungry traveler?" he asked.

"No biscuits, but only the crusts of two-day-old bread, and no flour to bake another loaf," I said. "I'll have nothing but roots from the garden until I go to market next week and sell these shawls."

"A potato, then, Missus?" he asked. "I'll eat the thing raw, I am that famished. Will you at least give me that?"

I could see he would not budge until I gave him something, so I nodded my head toward the kitchen garden.

"Go and dig us some potatoes and carrots, and I'll make a soup," I said.

The leprechaun smiled at me and spun around on his heels. In a flash he stood before me, with three potatoes and four young carrots. I took them inside. I chopped them, along with an onion from the cupboard, then threw the mess into a pot of water, and set the pot on the fire to cook. In a moment of generosity, I even threw in the last half rasher of bacon, which I had set aside for my dinner.

With my generous meal bubbling, I returned to the spot where I had been spinning, foolishly believing the leprechaun would be there. He had vanished, along with my spring lamb, all the yarn in my basket, and a spindle full of spun yarn.

On my stool was a note, which read, "Thank you for the mutton and the yarn, Missus. Good luck at the market next week. Perhaps you will find something else to sell."

There I was, with but two skeins of yarn and a heap of raw wool, and no spindle to spin it on. One sheep gone, and the other two shorn close to the skin. Nothing but a pot of water turning root vegetables into soup. A year's rent was due in a fortnight and I had no money at all. I admit I cried.

I pondered my options over a bowl of soup, liking none of them so well as finding the leprechaun and strangling the life from him. He was gone, with time and magic to aid in his getaway. I was here, with neither at my disposal to aid in finding him. I could knit maybe four shawls from the spun yarn that remained, and, if I could replace the spindle, spin enough yarn for two or three more. From the stolen yarn I could have made at least a dozen shawls. Even if I sold one of my remaining sheep, there would not be enough to pay the rent. The garden would yield barely enough to feed me through the fall and winter, and at that, spring would find me gaunt. I am untalented as a knitter; anything finer than shawls is beyond my skill.

"Eighteen shawls, at ten pounds each, would have given me the rent and five pounds over for buying bacon, flour and salt," I said to myself. "If I am lucky, the ewe will fetch twenty. It is hopeless." I berated myself for an hour, then began thinking more practically.

That afternoon, I trudged the two miles to Anna's cottage, to beg the use of her spinning wheel. She granted it, and I went straight to work on the raw wool I had carried in my pockets. As I sat spinning, I told her my tale, and she mentioned the well in the deep woods as a possible solution to my fate.

"You know that it granted our wish," she said.

"You are the happiest couple I know," I admitted. "But aren't wishes denied as easily as they are granted there?"

"It is the wisher who determines the outcome, not the well," Anna said, smoothing back her silvery hair.

"Then how can the well count for any bit of it?" I asked.

Anna looked up as the door to the cottage creaked open. Mark stood there, his curly black hair turned to iron gray, but he had kept his wiry young build. Anna's face glowed as she smiled at him, looking years younger herself. Watching their faces as they embraced, ignoring me, I saw what she meant. But it did not solve my problem.

Mark and Anna fed me supper, and sent a pound of flour home with me, over feeble protests.

Once home, I knitted until I drifted off to sleep. Working doggedly for the next two days, I completed seven shawls and an eccentric looking baby bonnet from the remaining wool. I climbed the rickety ladder to my attic and found a jumble of things to sell at market in town that Saturday, and which brought me barely eighteen pounds. Still, I knew I faced eviction without the missing wool.

Sunday I went to Mass, and people who had not seen me since Easter pointed and whispered behind their

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hands. I prayed half-heartedly, and looked around at the shopkeepers, wondering if any of them would hire me, but observed no likely prospects. Monday I woke wondering what to do.

I saw no other choice but to petition the well in the deep woods. I had no golden coins to toss down into its waters, but slipped a copper penny into my pocket along with a slice of stale bread.

The path through the deep woods to the well's clearing was well traveled, but I did not see another soul while I walked on it. I left shortly after sunrise, but the woods stayed dim; the leaves filtered a greenish imitation of sunlight onto the path. I walked on, sidestepping gnarled tree roots and slipping occasionally into the little rain gullies which sliced across the path.

The clearing, when I found it, glowed in diffused sunlight. Flowers drank in the sunshine here, and thrived in the tiny meadow surrounding the well. The well itself, encased in stones as old as Tara, stood proud in the middle of this grassy splendor. I approached slowly, in awe, despite myself, and dread. Would the well do its work for me? I wondered. Finally, I neared the edge of the well.

"Good day, Missus," a familiar voice said softly. There, at the opposite edge of the well, looking pleased as punch with himself, stood the leprechaun, bedecked in a new wool scarf, knitted, no doubt, from my stolen yarn.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him. "Haven't you done enough mischief to me already?"

The leprechaun smiled at me, and winked a bloodshot eye. He did a quick little jig step, moving a little farther away as he danced.

"Thank you for the food and wool, Missus, no sheep could have given finer," he said, smiling.

"That's all very well for you," I said, fuming, "you haven't had your livelihood stolen by a devious elf."

"Elf?" the Wee Man shouted indignantly. "I'll have you know, Missus, I am a royal descendant of the Tuatha de Danaan. To call me 'elf' is an ancient insult."

Of course I knew that. Leprechauns are known for three traits: trickery, intemperance, and vanity. This Wee One clearly had them all. I quickly formed a plan.

"If you are a leprechaun, then why could you not pay me for my sheep and yarn from your pot of gold?" I asked.

"Is that nonsense still bandied about?" he asked, stamping his little silver-buckled boot. "Do you not know that the English landlords found all the gold and hid it away? That leprechaun evictions were the most fearsome of them all?" he added.

"I've heard of no such evictions," I said, firmly, stepping small, soft paces toward him. "Did you not have a Land League under the hills?"

"If we had had a Land League, we would not have stopped at the English, Missus," he said. "We would have taken back this whole forsaken bloody isle."

"No need to curse at me, Little Man," I said, creeping slowly closer to my quarry. "But even if you've no pot of gold, you still could pay for what you took."

"How would I do that, Missus?" he asked, and stepped forward a pace himself.

I eyed the tiny tool belt wrapped around the leprechaun's portly middle. Sure enough, his tiny hammer and awl were securely fastened.

"Did you enjoy your lamb feast, then?" I asked.

"Indeed. My family and I haven't fed so well in years," he said.

"And what did you do with the leather?" I asked, pouncing on him, and grabbing tight to his arm before he could dance away.

I reached into my pocket and fished out the copper coin. Dragging the leprechaun forward, I stood at the edge of the well and dropped in the coin, as I announced my wish: "I wish this thieving leprechaun would repay me for my sheep and yarn by cobbling 20 pair of shoes from his store of leather, which he shall give me, and release his claim to, so I can sell them at the Sligo market."

"Ah, Missus, would you not rather have the gold?" he whined, but I only tightened my hold on his wrist.

"Twenty pairs, and quality the like to sell for 10 pounds, per," I said again to the well. "And with the profit I shall buy a small jug of spirits for the leprechaun who so helps me. But only after selling the shoes will I buy the spirits, and only if all 20 pair are sold at ten pounds per, for I must make enough profit to buy another sheep to make up for the one which was lost."

Then, still holding his wrist, I unwound the new scarf from around the leprechaun's neck, and tied one end to his wrist, and one end to mine. The stolen yarn made an excellent restraint, and, after minimal grousing, he set to work.

With a flourish of his free hand, a heap of tanned leather appeared, some still in the form of my lost sheep. I stayed tethered to him as he cobbled forty dainty slippers in four different sizes. As each pair (I checked to be sure they matched) was done, I placed it in my apron which I had made into a bag. When he had finished, I gave him my crust of bread.

"Do you swear that you will not enchant this bundle, and that I shall have 20 pairs of shoes when I return home?" I asked.

"Yes, Missus," he said mournfully.

I extracted more promises, trying to cover every contingency of leprechaun chicanery, then finally released my wrist from the restraint.

"Come to my cottage next Tuesday, and I shall give you your reward," I said. "If I can sell all the shoes you cobbled."

"Your wish is my command, Missus," he said, bowing low. The mention of the liquor perked him right up. Then he spun around on his heels three times and was gone.

The Sligo market swallowed up the shoes and shawls quickly, and one of the shopkeepers offered to sell the shoes regularly if I could guarantee a steady supply. I told him I'd think on it, and I have.

I don't know whether the well granted my wish, or whether it was the leprechaun's thirst. I brought him the jug I promised. We shared it, sitting before my front door, and negotiated the terms of our partnership in the shoe business. I saw no reason to tell him I'd laced the jug with a bit of water from the well.

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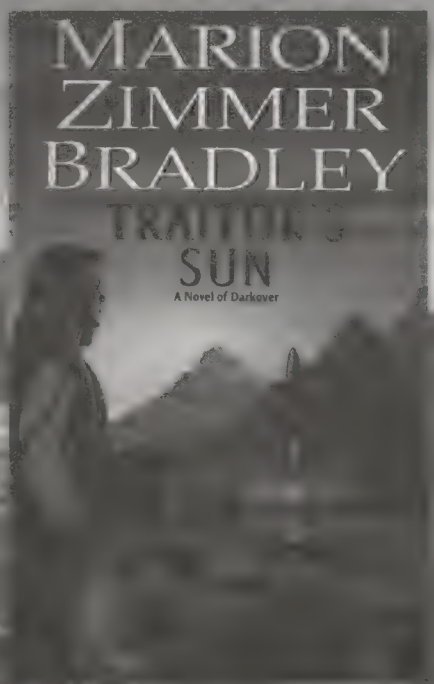

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The Seeds of Memory

by Barbara Davies

The coming of Djadek was a quiet affair. Miriba barely registered the padding of camel hooves, the jingling harness, as he rode past the boundary wall that was her only protection from the cold night air. The sounds seemed merely an addition to her dream, the usual one in which she was running, chasing someone always tantalizingly just out of reach.

She quickened her pace in time to the hoofbeats, but her quarry quickened her pace too. "Wait for me," she called out. "Please, wait." But the woman in the coral-pink dress didn't slow or turn round, didn't give any indication that she had heard her cry ...

When Miriba eventually awoke, brushed the dirt off her ragged skirt and blouse, and plodded in the dazzling sunlight to the marketplace, ready for the day's begging, an unusual sight awaited her. Instead of the early morning hubbub of stallholders and customers haggling over foodstuffs, pots, baskets, and camel hides, silence reigned. In the middle of the square, firmly holding the leading rein of his camel, was a stranger with a hooked nose and thick eyebrows, his dark hair swept back into a pony tail. Facing him, in a semicircle, stood the village Elders.

Normally the Elders cut imposing figures in their formal robes — the vivid reds and blues were a specialty of the village dye works — but today they looked like stick men in gaudy, ill-fitting sheets. The stranger's clothes were so well tailored they almost succeeded in disguising his large belly, and the finely woven fabric of his cream-colored tunic and trousers bore a subtle pattern of apricot, malachite, and rose.

Miriba blinked. The man was like some exotic desert bloom, and his camel was the healthiest she had ever seen, its eyes clear, its skin taut over well-muscled flesh. She strained to hear the conversation but caught only the word 'seeds'. The senior Elder suddenly nodded and squatted comfortably; the others did likewise. The stranger smiled, reached into his camel's exquisitely tooled saddlebag, and pulled out a fabric pouch. Miriba moved closer, accidentally stepping on the hem of someone's skirt.

"Watch where you're stepping, girl," hissed Bima, the washerwoman.

Miriba ducked her head in apology, but continued to press forward through the crowd, eliciting hostile murmurs about good-for-nothing orphans and dirty beggars as she went. At last she had reached the front, and she stopped. Too late, she realized she was standing next to Cirak.

Her chief tormentor, a boy two years younger than herself, was wearing his best blue tunic and trousers, and his long blond hair was freshly combed. He turned and glared at her, his mouth

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an ugly line. She looked at him warily, but his hands were empty. The small cut on her forehead was only just starting to heal, and she fingered it nervously. Unexpectedly, Cirak flushed and looked away.

What was this? she thought. Fear that she might tell someone about the thrown stone? Surely he knew no one would take the word of a beggar girl against that of an Elder's son? She sighed and peered over the bald heads and bony shoulders of the squatting Elders, trying to see what the stranger was doing.

He had placed something on the ground, and was pouring water from one of his waterskins onto it.

"What a waste," she murmured. Then abruptly she forgot all about wastage. Something was moving where the stranger had poured the water. Something green and spindly that wriggled and crawled towards the sky. A surprised murmur rippled through the onlookers, and the Elders muttered to each other.

"It's a snake," said Cirak, but Miriba could already see that he was wrong. A seedling, she thought. Two leaves, now four ... It was growing at an amazing rate. As she watched, a bud swelled into being at the plant's crown, the delicate petals a deep blue, almost indigo. She found that she was holding her breath.

With a slight *pop*, the petals opened and a strong fragrance wafted through the marketplace. The onlookers gasped.

It smelled like the earth after the rains, she thought, inhaling deeply. Or like ... She frowned, trying to grasp the elusive scent ....

The woman's back was towards Miriba, and she was leaning over a table. Everything in the familiar room looked twice the size it should be: the woman, the table ... Miriba frowned in puzzlement.

A coral-pink dress covered the woman's ripe hips and slim waist, and the hem, hitched up by her current posture, revealed trim ankles and a pair of matching pink sandals ....

Miriba recognised those ankles immediately. She made a slight noise, a clearing of her throat.

The woman turned, long dark hair swinging about her shoulders. She saw Miriba and smiled down at her, her eyes crinkling with warmth. "Sweetheart. How long have you been standing there?"

Pleasure flooded through Miriba, and to her own surprise she began to sob.

"Don't cry!" Her mother reached for her, and swung her up so that she straddled one hip comfortably. Then, one arm holding her securely, she turned to face the table again. "I'm making you a new dress. Do you like it?"

Miriba inhaled the familiar scent, that mixture of perfume and fresh sweat, of bread and biscuits. She gazed down at the things arrayed on the table top, at the shears, the lump of dressmaker's chalk, the panels her mother had already cut from the roll of pale tangerine fabric. She found it strange that she already knew what the dress would look like when it was finished. It would be her favorite ....

When Miriba came to her senses again, she felt stiff and gritty eyed, and totally lost. Her anguish was as fresh as the day her mother had died five years ago. "Mother," she croaked.

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Around her, people were stretching and murmuring in confusion. The shadows on the dusty ground had shifted slightly — half an hour had passed. She glanced at Cirak, but he seemed unaware of her, in a daze of his own. What *had* happened? Then she remembered the stranger.

The peculiar plant now lay shrivelled in front of him. Deliberately he ground it into the dust with his heel.

"My name is Djadek," he said, speaking clearly so that everyone in the marketplace could hear. "You have just experienced one of my seeds of memory. I hope you found it interesting?"

Miriba stared at him. Interesting?! She felt bruised and vulnerable, as though someone had just ripped the scar tissue off a very old wound.

"I have many more such seeds to sell. For a price." He named a figure that was two week's wages for some, and to such as Miriba, beyond all possibility.

"I was back in my father's bakery shop —" said a woman behind Miriba.

"I was making love for the very first time —" murmured an old man wistfully. "She was so beautiful, her flesh so firm ...."

"They're *our* memories!" objected someone else. "Why should we have to pay you to experience what is already ours?"

Djadek held up one hand, the material of his sleeve sliding back to reveal a wrist marred by ugly scars. His smile broadened. "My seeds trigger only *good* memories. Isn't that worth paying for?"

Miriba stared fiercely at him, so fiercely that he gave her a startled then speculative glance. *Who gave you permission to trigger my memories?* she thought angrily. I'd rather not remember at all if it's going to hurt so much!

Then she saw again the vivid smiling face of her mother, a face she hadn't been able to recall for years, and she wasn't so sure.

"Who would like to relive the good times?" continued Djadek, his gaze moving on.

The old man squeezed past her, holding out a coin. "Me," he croaked. Soon the seedseller was obscured by a crowd of villagers eagerly thrusting coins at him ....

Cirak pushed Miriba roughly aside and began to elbow his way to where his mother stood. "Mother," he called. "Will you buy me a seed? Please."

She sighed. There was no one to purchase a seed on her behalf, no way she could afford to buy breakfast let alone luxuries like good memories. And if people spent their spare cash on the seeds, there would be even less left for a poor beggar girl ....

Miriba was sitting in the shade of a wall, digging her toes disconsolately into the dirt, her belly rumbling, when a shadow fell across her cracked begging bowl. She looked up, shading her eyes against the bright sunlight. Gradually the silhouette resolved itself into recognizable features. Djadek the seedseller gazed down at her. He was holding something out to her in one fat fist. A coin.

"I know what it feels like to go hungry," he said.

Silently she reached for the coin.

"Is that so hard to believe?"

She shrugged, placed the coin between her teeth and bit it carefully. It was genuine. Then she looked pointedly at his belly, at his plump cheeks and double chin. But she knew better than to turn her criticism into words. What did she care about the motives of those who gave her money? As long as it meant she could survive another day ....

He continued to stare at her, his large brown eyes opaque. What was he waiting for?

"Thank you?" she offered.

It seemed to be enough. He smiled and nodded. "You're welcome." Then he strolled away.

Before he had turned the corner, Miriba was scrambling to her feet, eager to visit the foodseller ....

Over the next few days, Miriba found herself unexpectedly in demand. The first to require her services was Bima, who conveniently forgot her past unkindnesses, which had been many, and cajoled her, as though she were a wayward daughter, into helping with

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the backlog of washing. Miriba shrugged, and smiled, and acquiesced, for a small fee of course — enough to enable her to buy food and to spare.

The reason for the increasing backlog soon became clear. The villagers had agreed to let the seedseller stay and peddle his wares, and Bima was buying up to four seeds from him a day, spending hours locked away in a back room. Once, Miriba pressed her ear to the stout wooden door, and thought she could detect the faint tinkling notes of strange music, and once she even caught a whiff of orange blossoms, but in neither instance was the seed's influence strong enough to trigger a memory of her own. She sighed, envious of her employer and wondering why the washerwoman needed to escape so often into her past. If she had experienced even one-tenth what Miriba had ... She also wondered if she would ever be able save enough to buy a seed of her own, to see her mother's dear face again.

Reluctantly she returned to the huge pile of laundry. As she pounded the clothes against the washboard with her already red and cracked hands, then sluiced away the acrid-smelling soap, her thoughts returned to the peculiar seeds. She had heard that some memory flowers emitted scent, some sound — like the tinkling music she had heard coming from Bima's room — some even produced a display of iridescent flashing lights. Each kind triggered a memory, but afterwards it always died. So how, she pondered, scrubbing at a particularly stubborn stain, did the plant propagate?

She raised that point with another of her new employers. Cirak's mother had been too preoccupied with seeds lately to keep up with the housework, and paid her to scrub and sweep. But the other woman seemed unconcerned, as did her son.

"Who cares, camel fart?" asked Cirak, ignoring the fact that Miriba had yesterday treated herself to a long soak at the communal bathhouse and a new blouse. "As long as Djadek has enough seeds to sell, that's enough for me." And the rest of the villagers, including the Elders, seemed to agree with him.

And indeed Djadek's supply did seem to be endless, a fact which puzzled her. So late one afternoon, after she'd finished the washing for Bima and the sweeping for Cirak's mother, she went to the marketplace in search of Djadek. It was almost deserted, most of the stallholders and customers having left early to sample their latest memory seed. The seedseller was about to pack up for the day, to return to his luxurious billet at the senior Elder's house, but on seeing her he stopped what he was doing, and smiled.

"Ah, the pretty little beggar girl," he said. "In a new blouse, if I'm not mistaken. Come to buy a seed?"

She flushed at his personal comments and shook her head. "Next week maybe." If she saved every penny she earned, and didn't spend it on unimportant things like food, or keeping clean ... "Actually I wanted to ask you something," she said.

His gaze was keen. "Yes?"

"Where do your seeds come from?"

He laughed loudly, startling her. "So you expect me to give away all my secrets, do you? To put myself out of business? I knew you were a sharp one, as soon as I saw you."

Miriba was disconcerted. "Well, no, but..."

He tapped the side of his nose, and once again, as the sleeve of his tunic slid back, she saw those badly scarred wrists. One of the scars looked recent. "Nothing precious comes easily, or without pain, my girl. The seeds are no exception."

And with that, he waved her away. Grumbling softly to herself, Miriba went to find a comfortable place to sleep for the night.

Miriba stared at the seed, her very own seed, bought with every last penny she had, and sighed. Bima was doing her own washing again, and Cirak's mother had made it clear she no longer required her services. It would be back to the begging bowl tomorrow. At least, with Djadek gone, the villagers would again have surplus cash.

The seedseller had departed on his camel the night before, trailed by anxious villagers. "Another seedseller will

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be here soon," he promised them cheerfully, before riding off into the distance. Few believed him.

Miriba had been one of the last to purchase her seed. He had smiled at her. "Saved enough at last?" Silently she held out the coins, the most she had ever owned in her life. He replaced them with a single white seed. "Use it wisely," he said.

She frowned, unsure what he meant, then shrugged. "I will." His gaze followed her all the way across the marketplace. A few hours later

he was gone. She had been tempted to activate the seed immediately, but in the end decided against it. All night she had clutched it tightly in her fist, savoring its promise, wondering if she was doing the right thing. She longed to see her mother again, of course, but Bima's memory seeds hadn't made her any happier. Wasn't it sometimes better, well, easier at least, *not* to remember? After all, the good times were unlikely to return, and without hope there could be no disappointment. Her mind buzzing with conflicting thoughts, it was a long time before she fell asleep.

The sun had barely risen above the horizon when Miriba set out for the nearby desert, and for the solitude she needed to enjoy the memory seed — few of the villagers ever went to the place she called the Singing Dunes these days. It took her nearly an hour to get there, by which time she was hot and sticky, and parched with thirst. She sat in the shade of one of the massive dunes, and gulped a third of the water she'd brought with her. That which remained she would split between watering the seed and saving for the return journey,

To the eerie sound of humming made by the sand grains rubbing together in the wind, she scooped out a shallow indentation in the sand and carefully placed the seed in it. For a long time she simply stared at it. Once it was gone, what next?

She remembered Djadek's words: "Use it wisely," and frowned. Perhaps it was simply a platitude, but she didn't think so. She pictured the enigmatic seedseller, his intense gaze and hooked nose. He had given her a coin and told her he knew what it felt like to be hungry. Had he spoken the truth? He was well fed, pampered even ... What had happened to change his fortunes?

If only he had answered her questions directly. "Nothing precious comes easily, or without pain." Ha! What could the seedseller possibly know of pain? But something about him was nagging at Miriba, something that seemed out of place. It was a while before she was able to pinpoint what it was: the vicious-looking scars on both his wrists. She stared at the white seed in its nest of fine golden crystals, her thoughts roiling.

As though in a dream, she reached into her skirt pocket and pulled out her begging bowl. The hairline crack was spreading and now almost bisected the base. She stared at it for a moment, then thumped it on the sand; it broke in half. She picked up both pieces, examined them, then discarded the blunter one.

The edge of the shard was cold against her wrist, and she hesitated. Suppose she was wrong? Suppose she was wasting her last chance to see her mother again? Then she shrugged, and swiftly drew the sharp edge against tender flesh. Blood welled up instantly in a thin, scarlet line, but, strangely, it didn't hurt at all. Perhaps she hadn't cut deeply enough. Then blood started to drip onto the sand, staining it, and she dropped the jagged shard and hast-

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

ily positioned her wrist above the seed. Perhaps all liquids had the same effect, anyway, she told herself, trying to keep from hoping. Blood, water, it didn't really matter .... Belatedly, the cut began to sting, and she sucked in her breath.

Plop. The seed absorbed the first droplet of blood without change. *Plop*. Another red teardrop splattered it and disappeared. Miriba peered closely at the seed. Was it her imagination, or was its pristine whiteness sullied now, more of a pale pink? *Plop, plop*. She was beginning to bleed faster. Quckly she ripped a strip of material from the hem of her skirt and prepared to bind up the cut. *Plop, plop, plop*.

Abruptly the seed began to rock. Then, with a sharp crack, it split, right down the middle, and two ... no, three ... strong green shoots erupted. Startled, Miriba reared back, almost dropping her makeshift bandage. The seedling thrust thick black roots deep into the sand, to anchor the swiftly growing plant. Soon it was almost three feet tall, each shoot as thick as her thumb. She finished binding up her throbbing wrist, and stared at the plant. At the end of each shoot, red buds the size of her fist were beginning to form, nothing like the delicate flower buds on memory seedlings. These weren't buds, she realized suddenly, but pods.

The day crawled by, and it looked like nothing further was going to happen to the plant. Miriba frowned at it, at its lush pods, wondering what to do next. If she picked the pods before they were ripe ...? Then, the dune's shadow, which had crept slowly round, allowed a shaft of blazing sunlight to illuminate one of the pods, and before her eyes the pod began to ripen and then to wither. Eventually, the dried pod dropped onto the sand. Nervously she reached for it, and slit it open with her thumbnail. Then she stared at it, mouth open, and at the massed rows of white seeds inside.

By the time the sun sank beneath the horizon, all the pods had dried and fallen to the sand: the plant too had shrivelled to a husk. Carefully, Miriba collected every single seedpod. Her wrist still throbbed, but was much less painful than it had been. She would ask the healer for a salve when she returned to the village; it would cost several pennies, but she could afford it, now.

She reached into her pocket, felt a seedpod's rough texture against her fingertips, and smiled. How many seeds per pod? Fifty? A hundred? There would be plenty to go round, for herself and for others ... at a price. The scar on her wrist would have healed over long before she needed to cut it again.

She felt rather lightheaded, like laughing and crying at the same time. Blood loss? The fact that she hadn't eaten all day? Or maybe it was just that the burden of day-to-day survival had finally been lifted from her shoulders. And she could still trigger the memories of her mother if she wanted to ....

Miriba rose stiffly and began the long trek back to the village. As she walked she hummed in time to her footsteps. Suddenly, the picture of Cirak's face, startled at being forced to buy his seeds from her, popped into her head, and she laughed and skipped for a few steps, and then began to sing at the top of her voice. The coming of Miriba the seedseller, she vowed, would not be such a quiet affair.

❄

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

Barbara Davies was born in September, 1953, in Birmingham, UK, and now lives in Cheltenham in the English Cotswolds. She has always read and loved fantasy and sf (she's a longstanding member of the British Science Fiction Association), and since 1988 she's been trying to write her own genre short stories with varying degrees of success. Several of her stories have been published in small magazines such as *Peeping Tom* and *Broadsword* and more are in the pipeline. She reviews fantasy books for the UK magazine *Starburst*.

Omar Rayyan began drawing unicorns at the age of two and hasn't gotten the opportunity to do a single unicorn job since. But magazines, children's books, and gaming cards have been keeping him busy and winning him the occasional award. He is currently working on a children's book from his tiny cottage in the woods of West Tisbury, CT, with his one wife, two cats, twelve fish, and a pretentious budgie. See more of his art at **www.tiac.net/rayyan/**.

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THE LAST WORD

Some issue, don't you think? My special favorite in this issue is "The Highwayman", but when I was proofreading, I was struck by how much I enjoyed *all* the stories. Hope you felt the same.

You may have noticed that the cover and the table of contents pages look different: Kathy DeVore of Oklahoma City was taking a graphic arts class and used us for her homework. She got an A for her redesign and decided to send us what she'd done. We were so impressed at the modern feel it provided, we arranged to use her ideas. The new cover font is Umber, from a Mac/PC CD-ROM put out by KeyFonts, "FontsPro 2002". It's an uncial font, uncials being a style of calligraphy popular in the early middle ages. I've always liked uncial fonts, which tend to be drawn with a pen point held perpendicular to the vertical axis of the paper (rather than angled, as italic fonts are drawn). My other favorites are Lombardy Capitals; maybe I'll ask Margaret Davis to give us some for a story in one of the upcoming issues.

There's another CD we use often for clip art which deserves mention: a terrific three-volume set called "Desk Gallery Clip-Art Library", published by Zedcor, Inc., of Tucson, Arizona.

The magazine has nearly completed its eleventh full year of publication; our next issue will be number 44. We're looking forward to that anniversary, and to having peace and quiet back at the office. At the moment, it's a little chaotic around here, since renovations on Marion's house have begun. We've had to come into the office walking on plywood sheets laid down over the muddy construction site, and every day it seems they destroy something new as they prepare to replace the ground floor of the house. **BOOM! BOOM! BANG! CRASH!** The driveway is often blocked, a constantly-changing group of men come on and off the property, and there are frequent power outages (after it's been shut off, my PC does **not** like to be turned on again; like a cranky teenager, it whines and groans for a bit before it consents to go back to work — on the other hand, the Macs all perform perfectly, and the HP printer is fine). Most of the garden plants — Marion's roses, irises, and lilacs — have been dug up and moved to safety in large pots and temporary flower beds, and we are hoping that the wisteria cuttings we planted will take root since the plant was too large to move. (It had been there probably eighty years, winding around an old tree trunk in the yard and faithfully producing long plumes of fragrant purple flowers every spring, and providing us with a living display of Art Nouveau leaves and branches the rest of the year.)

Our cover this time is a reprint of the Westercon 50 program book artwork — Victoria Lisi (who once lived near Seattle and went by the name Vicky Poyser) had sent it to me as a sample of the work she and her husband do, and the whole office agreed we should buy rights to reprint it. Between the time she mailed it to me and this issue, she'd moved from Connecticut to Colorado, so it took a few phone calls to track her down to get permission and arrange for a transparency to be sent.

This issue also marks the first appearance of Chesley-winning artist Joy Marie Ledet, whose drawing "Twig" illustrates "Pocketful of Wool". More of her work can be seen at a website — one of the nicest I've seen for sf/fantasy artwork — run by Pandora's Management Service, at **http://www.fc.net/~pms/**.

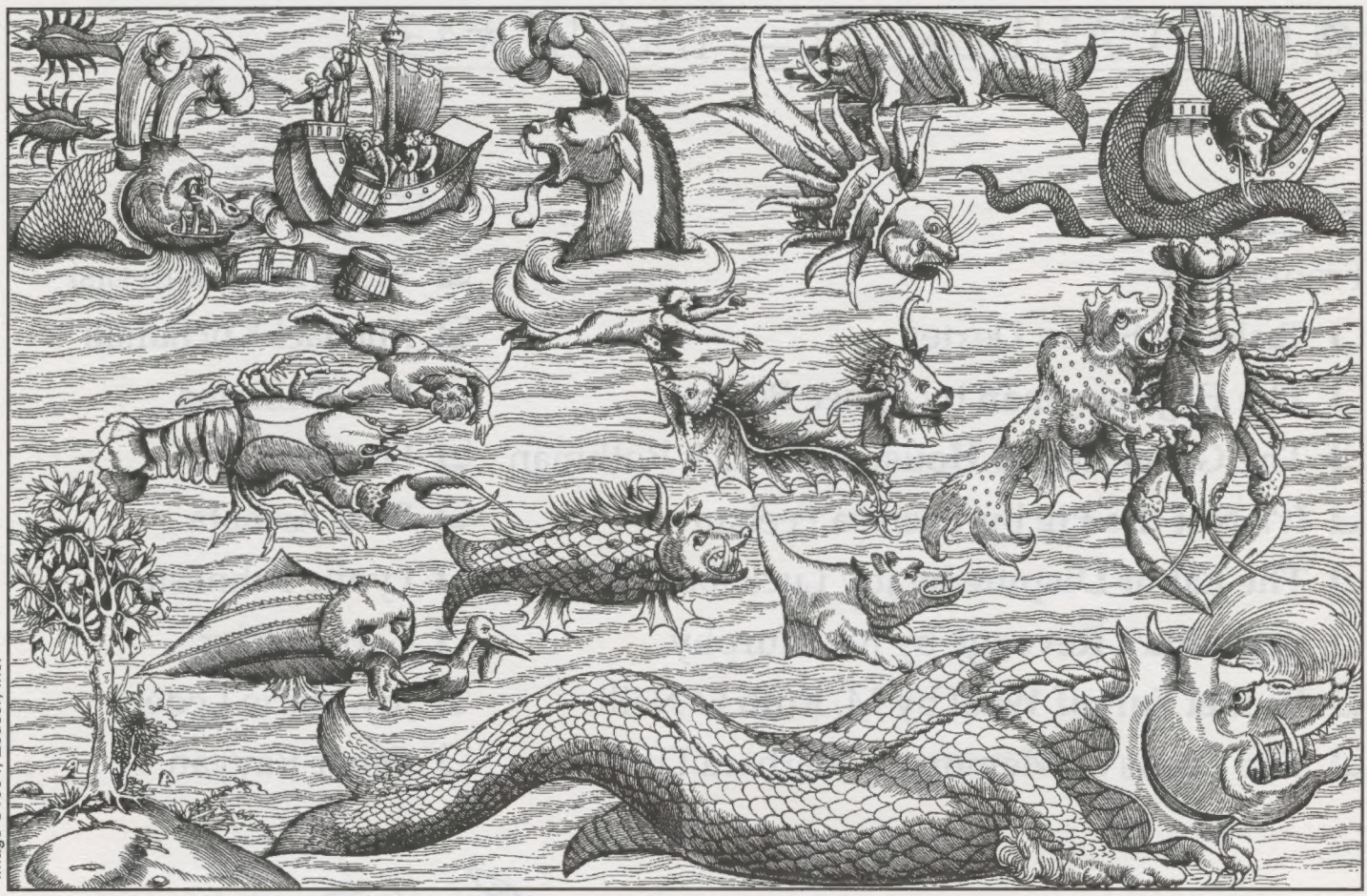
Every week or so, we post something new on our own website — an interview, an updated set of guidelines, new links to sites of interest — so check regularly at **http://www.mzbfm.com**. Margaret Davis and I redesigned the site recently, to make it more attractive and to make the opening page a bit faster to load, and we'll continue to refine it for usability. Anyone who's made money from their writing will want to check out Elisabeth Waters' article, "Death, Taxes, and the Writer", currently featured on the site. We've also added her article from *Speculations* entitled "What Have You Done with my Manuscript?", in case any of you have been wondering.

Http://www.sff.net/people/tbisson/: If our interview with author Terry Bisson intrigues you, he has an interesting website also; I particularly recommend his thoughtful comments about Mumia Abu Jamal, and the amusing short comic "Bears in Space" by Joe Mayhew. (Joe, if memory serves, works for the Library of Congress and champions science fiction there, and he ran the art show for the World Fantasy Convention when it was in Baltimore, MD.) Bisson's work was brought to my attention some years ago by editor David Hartwell, who gave me a copy of **TALKING MAN** once when I visited his office. I really enjoyed the book, both as an epic road-trip novel and for the way Bisson wove magic into the tale, and proceeded to lend my copy to several friends with the command, "You've got to read this." Turns out Bisson used his fondness for cars not just for road-trip novels but for a collaboration with Tom and Ray Magliozzi; he is the co-author of **CAR TALK WITH CLICK AND CLACK, THE TAPPET BROTHERS** (as Tom and Ray are better known to most of us).

The influence is of Terry's stories is wide: My minister once used Bisson's short story "They're Made out of Meat" as the basis for a sermon (Bisson was amused when I mentioned this), and San Jose's Tech Museum of Innovation has made the story a part of a permanent exhibit called "Are We Alone?" Bisson's first published work was "Crazy Duck", published in 1963 in New York City's *Village Voice*, "considered by some critics to be one of the top duck poems to come out of the 60s." Not only does he write books and short stories, he does radio scripts: Terry Bisson and Brian Smith have collaborated for *Seeing Ear Theater*, including a production of "The Toxic Donut" featuring Bisson's friend Peter Coyote. There's another nice site about Bisson at **http://www.iplus.zetnet.co.uk/tb.htm**, featuring a biography and two other interviews.

Enjoy the spring. I'll be at NorWesCon before you read this, where I hope to interview Harry Turtledove — I just finished his alternate Civil War novel **HOW FEW REMAIN**. After that's it's WisCon in Madison, Foolscap in Seattle, and then Westercon in Spokane (which is putting out a commemorative CD as well as a program book).

— *Rachel E. Holmen*



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STORY	ARTIST
Front cover	❑ Victoria & Julio Lisi
❑ **Tasks** by Susan Dexter	❑ Michael Kucharski
❑ **The Highwayman** by Renee Bennett	❑ Ray Williams
❑ **The Gingerbread House** by Chuck Rothman	❑ Lori Deitrick
❑ **It's Not the Pig** by Theresa Feehan	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **The Labor Dispute** by Joy Luckabaugh	❑ Lynne Fahnestalk
❑ **Betremia's Revenge** by Joe Murphy	❑ George Barr
❑ **Pocket Full of Wool** by M. Ruth O'Neill	❑ Joy Marie Ledet
❑ **The Seeds of Memory** by Barbara Davies	❑ Omar Rayyan

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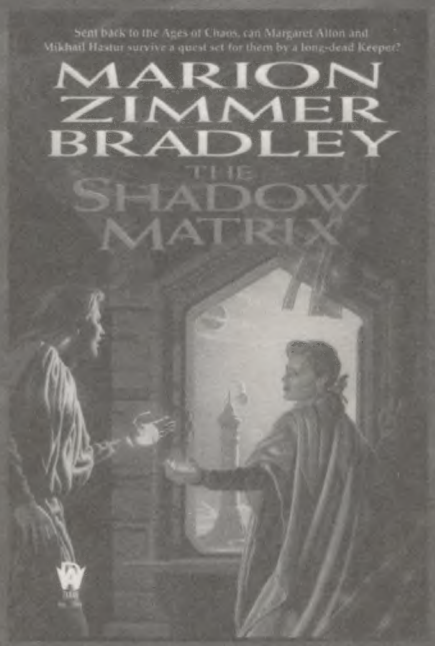
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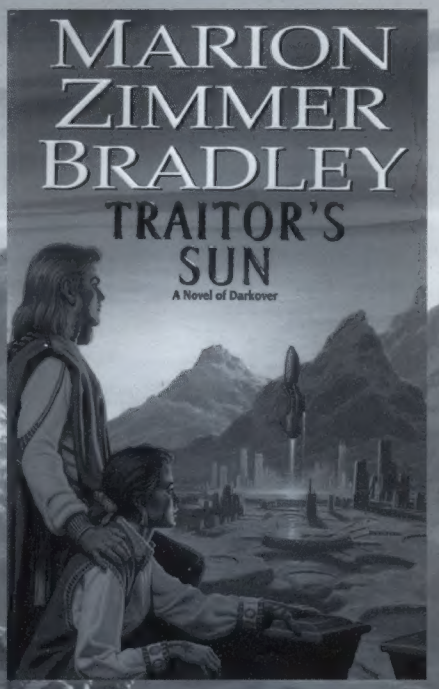

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